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# LUCY AYLMER.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

“THE CURATE OF OVERTON.”

If thou do ill; the joy fades, not the pains:  
If well; the pain doth fade, the joy remains.

GEORGE HERBERT.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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## LUCY AYLMER.

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### CHAPTER I.

“And when thou wast gone,  
I felt an aching here. I did not speak  
To any one that day. But from that day  
Bartolemé grew hateful unto me.”

LONGFELLOW.

THE Squire was fairly beaten : Augusta on one side and Archer on the other, had argued and persuaded so successfully, that Mr. Neville actually agreed to allow Maude and Lucy to accompany their aunt on her return to town. Archer had particularly pressed it on his brother, pleaded the finishing their education, forming their ideas, &c.—but his real motive for wishing it so much was this : the Lady Flora had conceived a great attachment

for Lucy. Archer observed everything, and turned everything to account—even this girlish friendship. In the latter end of April, the Countess and her daughters were to take up their residence in Park Lane. What would then attract the Lady Floras so much to the house in May-Fair, as its being for a time, the abode of the gentle Lucy? Archer looked forward into the future and foresaw this, foresaw opportunities, otherwise impossible, of frequent meetings with the Lady Flora, whom he adored all the more, because he could not openly declare it. The day following that happy evening, when Lucy's paper gained so much applause, Lord Glendowan had been sent for suddenly from the Highlands, as it was supposed the Lady Damer was dying. Her noble brother departed in all haste, after a warm adieu to his *fiancée*. Flora cried when he went, not from sorrow, but a melancholy feeling took possession of her, an augury of future ill, and she sat sadly in the Ghost's Turret that evening, resolved to keep out of the way of Archer Neville. But this was impossible; he remained at Castle St. Agnes, a week after Lord Glendowan. Oh! how Flora

wished him gone! Never was she alone in the saloon, or wandering solitary in the Park, but Archer seemed to come across her. How cleverly did he converse—how kindly draw out her opinion on the subject of which they happened to be talking—how he concealed his own learning and encouraged hers! and finally he flattered her so adroitly, so artfully, that it would have required one keener than herself to perceive it! Then also did he show her manifold little attentions, careful, unobtrusive, visible to no one but herself; winning, fascinating, but yet painful to the Lady Flora; for she was not free, she was Lord Glendowan's. What right had she then to receive attentions from Archer Neville?

She longed for the week to be over—and it passed by and was gone like a dream! and she stood by Lucy's side and wished Archer good-bye in the hall. She thought he pressed her hand, and she felt the look he cast on her was pleading and carried love in its glance. She coloured deeply and turned away, and when she looked again, he was gone! The Lady Flora was absent and gloomy the rest of the day; a cold dreariness hanging over

her. She missed Archer by her side at dinner ; she missed their evening hours at chess, when his voice ever and anon murmured soft and low some half-expressed sentence of devotion. And the Lady Flora wished Archer back, yet wept at the wish, for to her it seemed sinful, she the betrothed of Lord Glendowan ! And at night when her eyes closed in sleep, she dreamt that she was being married to Archer, then awoke and trembled at her dream, as though she could help it, poor Lady Flora ! Then a former desire came again into her heart, that there were Protestant convents : her life was useless ; she would so gladly enrol herself among a Protestant sisterhood, and give herself up to good works ! Ah ! Lady Flora, there are good works to be performed without convent walls. Read your Bible and you will find it so !

Augusta did not accompany her brother home ; the Countess persuaded her to remain till Lent commenced, when her nieces would return with her, for then, and not till then, would the Countess part with Maude and Lucy. They were to live very quietly during Lent, pass their mornings in study, the after-

noon in walking or driving, and occasionally enliven their evenings by an oratorio or a concert. At Easter, Miss Neville always repaired to Brighton. It would be April then; and the Squire was to join them in town, and either take his daughters home, or leave them for the season, as he felt inclined and they wished. Hard frosts and severe snow-storms, considerably retarded the repairs at the Manor, which could not be completed until March or April. The Squire determined to take up his residence in the uninjured wing, and superintend in person the rebuilding, and thus hasten the workmen. Cecil Erresford left the Castle at the end of January for Park Lane, to be ready for the opening of Parliament: he felt sorry to quit his home circle, his sister Flora, and Lucy whom he loved like a sister. It might have been something more, only that he saw how her heart clung to Robert, and Robert's to her. It was a keen disappointment, for he imagined there could be no one else on earth so good as Lucy. Augusta Neville's designs on him failed, but she was not daunted—wait till he sees me in town—she thought—where I am the centre of attraction in my

circles, and he will be the first man who has been proof against me! So reasoned handsome Miss Neville. Poor Augusta! she was growing sadly *ennuyée*, now the gentlemen of their party were so much thinned, and rather longed for the day of their departure. To pass the time, she occupied herself with Lucy, devoting some hours every day to practising music and singing and reading French with her. Maude had made friends with Agnese, and gained Lady Anne's permission to study Italian with her during her stay at the Castle. Agnese was a person of superior education; she was a protégée of the Marchesa Elmo, where Lady Anne first met her. The Padre Anastasio, the Marchesa's brother, had himself directed the education of Agnese, who was now more a *confidante* than maid to the Lady Anne, who had other attendants under Agnese.

It was the morning of Ash Wednesday. The Castle party was assembled in the breakfast-room: the Lady Anne only was wanting; a chair was left vacant for her beside Squire Neville, when the door suddenly opened and she came in. Lucy started and turned

pale—tall and stately looked the Lady Anne; but what had happened? Wherefore was her Ladyship clad in robes of the deepest mourning? Why did black crape hang heavily over the bombazine of her dress, and not one particle of white appear either on collar or sleeves? She could not have been more sable clad had it been the funeral-day of the Countess? Maude opened her eyes with wonder and astonishment; she did not comprehend it—nor could the Squire, unsophisticated man! understand the meaning of this sudden change in her costume; and he became still more puzzled, when the Lady Anne stedfastly refused all the offered dishes, and made her breakfast off a single cup of tea, and slice of dry bread. Poor Lucy was alarmed, Lady Anne, she thought, must be very ill, or perhaps it was the anniversary of the death of some one she loved!—Maude and her father were not so charitable in their suppositions, but set down this change of attire, as another of Lady Anne's eccentricities. Lucy grew more and more uncomfortable; and, at last, summoning up all her slender stock of courage, and with cheeks of

carnation hue, she said in meek tones, "I am afraid you are ill, Lady Anne?"

"Not in the least, Lucy, thank you," she replied courteously.

"Oh I thought something was the matter," added Lucy bashfully. Lady Anne knew Lucy was in earnest, for she never ridiculed any one. Lady Flora whispered low to Lucy something in which the word "Lent," was heard; but still innocent Lucy was in darkness. How was Lent possibly connected with Lady Anne's mourning attire? Lent was a time when Lucy every year had gone more frequently to church, and offered up her holy prayers in the old pew near the font—and she had listened reverently to the lessons and liked to ponder over the beautiful history she learned from them—Religion to her was something very exquisitely simple; she took it entirely from the Bible and there she learnt that the "pure in heart shall see God—that the merciful are blessed—that the ways of religion are ways of pleasantness and all her paths are peace—that Christ loved little children."—She was not a little child now! No, not in years, but she was a child in purity—



in guilelessness—and she still read day by day our Saviour's words, "suffer little children to come unto me"—and in her prayers, mentioned herself as a child. It never once occurred to her that a dark garb, or weeks of penance were necessary to win the heavenly crown she delighted to read of; or that merit consisted in attending church day after day, till the services she loved, and the Sunday her heart delighted in more than any day in seven, became wearisome. She thought in her simplicity that the Bible and Prayer Book were the guides of all churchmen; and that if they kept to them, they could not go wrong; but she had yet to learn how numbers, falsely called churchmen, altogether reject the Bible, and differ from the articles and creeds of the very Prayer Book they profess to set up as their standard! Ah, fair child! there is much which in thy quiet home is hidden from thee; much it were better thou should'st never know—much of the world's wickedness—its hypocrisies and its cheats that will make thy young heart sore, while yet the sunshine should be playing o'er it, and the rough

winds warded off, by the very hands that shall draw them down on thee !

“I wish, Anne,” Lady Flora said after breakfast, when the Countess and the Squire had withdrawn, “you would not put on that ugly mourning every Lent. It is so unbecoming, if you only knew how much older it makes you look.”

“I think, Flora, it would be far better if you did not dictate,” replied Lady Anne.

“Oh, Anne ! I do not dictate,” said Lady Flora in an apologetic tone, “only it is such a pity : if I did not care for you, I should not say anything about it ; but I dislike to see you look so dismal.”

“What is the use of wearing mourning in Lent ?” asked Maude. “I never saw it before.”

“Maude, you do not understand the Church’s year,” was the short reply.

“What ? Lady Anne !” exclaimed Maude. “I thought there was only one kind of year, with twelve calendar months in it ?”

Maude looked dreadfully impertinent.

“The Church’s year begins with Advent, and ends the last Sunday after Trinity,” Lady

Anne said coldly ; “ and there are times and seasons in that year which we are enjoined to observe.”

“ Most people go to church on Ash-Wednesday, but why should they go into mourning for Lent ? It is not dead, we shall see dozens more,” said the saucy Maude.

“ We cannot tell but this may be our last,” replied Lady Anne, in a low, solemn tone, that made her sister shudder.

“ Do you wear mourning to-day because you think you may not live till next year ?” exclaimed Maude, with a look of astonishment. “ That is a new idea, Lady Anne, and at that rate, why not put on crape every Christmas, or even every day for the same reason ?”

“ You do not understand the days or seasons,” replied Lady Anne, who was rather vain of her fortitude, and thought herself a martyr, because she occasionally got laughed at for her religious follies ; for she did what every one should so carefully avoid, she made religion appear ridiculous.

“ But what have the days and seasons to

do with your wearing black to-day, Lady Anne?" persisted Maude.

Lady Anne turned round to Lucy, who stood by, a silent and astonished hearer. "Lucy," she said, "you are more thoughtful and reverent than your sister. Tell me why is Lent observed?"

Lucy coloured at being so pointedly addressed, then replied in her gentle tones, "We celebrate in Lent, the forty days and forty nights which our Saviour passed in the desert."

Lady Anne looked satisfied. "Yes," she exclaimed, in an impassioned tone the girls had never heard her use before, "yes! for forty days our Holy Church bows herself down, and we prostrate and humble ourselves, and fast and mourn even as our Lord Himself fasted and mourned. Our souls are sorrowful—acts of penance, works of mercy, alone soften our hearts and sorrows, which increase more and more till the awful day arrives, which is the climax of the Church's affliction. Then does darkness enshroud our churches, darkness enshroud ourselves; and

we lie prostrate before our altars, in weeping and supplication, till the Church's triumph day arrives: then do flowers adorn our churches instead of their sable hangings, and we ourselves in garments of brightness, rejoice that our Lord is risen! Yes! on Easter day, the Church's full triumph comes. Oh, blessed day! who does not hail its approach with great rejoicing!" She looked around; her eyes met Lucy's so full of wonder, her face wearing that expression of almost painful surprise, which the propounding of any new and strange doctrine, for the first time sounding on our ears, often calls forth. Lady Anne said, in a voice of compassion. "Ah! Lucy child! you have yet to learn the full blessedness of that Holy Catholic Church to which we belong."

Maude had been silent. Her large, deep eyes were fixed in confused wonderment on Lady Anne's countenance, but now she burst forth in indignant tones.

"Indeed, Lady Anne, neither Lucy nor I are Catholics. Our church is as Protestant as any in England, and we were christened there!"

“ Ah ! that Holy Baptism,” murmured Lady Anne, “ wherein the Church saved you, and made you all her own !”

“ Did you learn all these strange things in London, Lady Anne ? Because if you did, I would rather not go there. I will not be made a Catholic, no, not for anyone !”

“ But you are a Catholic, Maude, and nothing will ever unmake you,” replied Lady Anne, coldly.

“ Prove it, Lady Anne !” exclaimed Maude.

Lucy thought Maude spoke too warmly, and she feared Lady Anne would think her rude, so she said, in a soft tone of apology :

“ A great many years ago, one of mamma’s ancestors was burnt by Catholics : you can read about it in the Martyrs ; and Maude and I do not like to be classed with them.”

“ Lucy, you are mistaken,” Lady Anne replied in her usual cold manner. “ Those were Roman, but we are Anglo-Catholics. They differ from us slightly ; but the time may come when we shall be united.”

“ Make them Protestants first,” grumbled Maude.

Lady Flora bent over her work and sighed.

“ Oh ! these endless disputes ! ” she murmured.

Maude put her hands to her flushed cheeks, and sauntered out on the terrace, and began to sing, “ Begone dull Care.” Her first discussion with Lady Anne made little impression on her volatile mind, but with Lucy it was far otherwise ; she went slowly up the wide oak staircase to dress for church, her mind feeling painfully confused, and her young face looking grave. The first of Lady Anne’s shadows had fallen upon her—Protestants were Catholics, and Baptism saved you ! This was strange, she wished she had never heard it !

“ You must not attend to Anne.” Lady Flora said, as Lucy and herself walked to church together. “ Anne is so odd—she is half a Roman Catholic, though she pretends not to be.”

“ Do many people think like Lady Anne ? ” Lucy asked anxiously.

“ Oh, numbers ! ” replied Flora. “ I do not agree with her and never shall, and Cecil does not ; but mamma does in some

measure ; it is fashionable—but mamma is not like Anne.”

Lucy looked disappointed and still more mystified — “ Fashionable !” she murmured to herself—and a ‘fashionable religion’ seemed a strange sounding title ! Lucy was rather early in church, and she read in her old brown Bible a few of her favourite verses, which she had marked with a pencil ; and as she read, peace returned to her mind, and she ceased to think of the morning’s conversation.

That Ash Wednesday seemed all bustle to Lucy : they were to leave dear old Forsted on the morrow, and there was no end of people who wanted to bid Maude and Lucy farewell. Some of their poor village friends had made them pin-cushions and needlebooks, they said, for the journey, as though London were America, or any such far off land ; and Lucy promised to write to one or two of her favourite old women, who kissed her hands and blessed her, and promised to pray for her when she was gone ; and then they cried and sobbed, as if the parting



were for ever, and Lucy was quite distressed and cried too, till Robert came to find her, and carry her off for a walk in the fields. Maude was detained behind by some farmers' daughters, who had visited the metropolis and were immensely proud of their journey, and talked a great deal of '*Busses* and them lovely *theatres!*' and told Maude not to forget to be on the look out for the Ethiopian Serenaders, nor to omit a visit to St. Paul's! The Miss Perkins had lodged hard by the Cathedral, and had been wonderfully impressed with the "*moniments!*" When Maude had heard these young ladies out, Lucy and Robert were lost sight of—so she went to the Manor to look for her father. The poor Squire was, what he was pleased to style, rather down in the mouth! Now the time came for them to leave, he was reluctant to part with his girls, and made many promises of soon having a run up to town to look after them. Something of the kind also entered Robert's mind, though he kept his thoughts a secret: he never knew how he loved Lucy, till he was parting from her!—

“You will not forget me, will you, Lucy?” he asked as they walked along.

“Oh, no! never Robert!” she replied, “and you will write and tell me all the news, and how my old women get on?”

Lucy and Robert had corresponded for years.

“You shall have such long letters,” he answered, “and I will send you some flowers in them.”

“Poor dear flowers! I shall not see many when I go,” she observed mournfully.

“Oh! there are beautiful gardens in London,” said Robert “where you will see roses in summer, finer than you ever saw even at Lady Fairfield’s.”

Lucy was silent for some moments, and then she said, “I shall be glad to come home again, Robert.”

“And I shall be more glad than you can think to have you here again. Forsted will be so dull without you.”

“Lady Flora says she shall miss us very much; it is nice to be missed, because it shows people love you!” said Lucy simply.

“Ah, it does indeed!” murmured Robert with feeling.

“Take care of papa for us,” continued Lucy, “and poor old Tawney, and my garden; do not let the workmen trample it down, if you can help it—and please plant those seeds Maude gave you, in your garden—you will want flowers to look gay when we return.”

“I shall have the church-bells rung when you do—such a peal!” said Robert.

Lucy smiled. “Do you know, Robert, I have got such an odd wish into my head about the bells?”

“What is it, dear Lucy?”

“You will say it is silly, but I should so like to hear them ring once more before we leave to-night, before the ringers go to bed. Oh! the sounds do come so sweetly across to the Castle, they seem quite heavenly.”

“Poor Lady Anne, if she hears them!” said Robert musingly. “I should like to oblige you dear Lucy, but then it is Lent.”

“Oh! never mind,” replied Lucy, a little disappointed. Nevertheless in spite of Lent, a peal now soft, now loud, now falling, was wafted across the clear, still air, that night.

Lucy was in her own room. She had retired to rest early, preparatory to the fatigues of the next day—so she cared not what Lady Anne thought. She only felt how heavenly the sounds were! and how much Robert loved her!

Fond, affectionate Robert! He was at Castle St. Agnes, early that parting morning, wished tender good-byes and watched the travellers off, then he went and strolled alone in one direction, while the Squire quite heart-broken at those last looks, those last kisses, wandered away in another. Lady Flora went into her own room to solace herself with her paintings; but, instead, blinded her eyes with tears. On the Saturday morning following, three little notes rested in the postman's bag, one for the Squire, one for Lady Flora, and another for Robert. In the Squire's, Maude wrote on one side the paper, and Lucy the other. Maude said, she thought the journey would never end; that there was so much smoke in London, that her face was all over blacks before she arrived at May-Fair; that the noise of carriages in the night was terrible; that the houses looked dismal, and stood side

by side in hundreds; and that London might turn out jolly after all, but it did not look so! Lucy told her father how she missed him; that the stars shone by night, though the sky was dark by day; that Aunt Augusta had hyacinths in her windows; and that the poor people in the streets looked so miserable, it made her sad; and she wished they could see the fields and hills at Forsted. She wrote much in the same way to Lady Flora and Robert. Only in Robert's letter she added messages to the villagers, and called herself at the end, his "dear sister Lucy."

## CHAPTER II.

“ Whatever wea or woe betide,  
Turn never from the way of truth aside.”

SOUTHEY.

CECIL ERRESFORD took a number of Blackwood off a table strewn over with papers, and sat down in a window of his club to read. He had not, however, read long, before something reminded him, that he had unopened letters in his pocket. How could he have forgotten them so long? Both bore the post mark of Sleebury and one had on its seal, the impress of the Aylmer Arms. He opened the first and read; and so ran the letter:—

“ Dear Erresford,

“ You will wonder why I have suffered so short a space of time to intervene between my

last letter and this, but the reason is soon told. I have a request to make, not for myself, but for St. Walburga. Our organ is purchased. I concluded the bargain for Lady Anne, on Saturday. Lord Glendowan was with me, and thinks we have chosen well. He played "In verdure clad," from the Creation; and the swell on the notes was perfect, and threw the Countess, who was one of our party, into ecstasies. But now, Erresford, comes the difficulty. Through the bounty of Lady Anne, we are presented with an organ; our furniture is bought—but we have no room to put it in. In the body of the church, it is impossible, we have measured and tried every way, but in vain. The only place for our splendid instrument is the gallery; with slight alterations, it would stand there admirably; but the gallery is entirely appropriated to the use of Castle St. Agnes. In fact, as you know, it is your family pew. Now, the Countess and your sister suggest, that it should be given up to the new and good use I have mentioned; and by throwing out the chancel, a pew could be made, more comfor-

table and better arranged, in place of the present one. Lady Anne kindly volunteers to take upon herself the expense of the alterations, and nothing is wanting but your consent, for you know, Erresford, I would not undertake anything of the kind without asking it. We await it anxiously, and confidently rely upon not being disappointed. I have no news to offer you, and if I speak of myself, it will be but to say how I daily weary and sicken of a bachelor life! Lady Anne would fain persuade me that a clergyman, to attain at all to a state of thorough self-denial and alienation from the world, should renounce all thoughts of a married life (mind, I have not been confessing to her my heart's hope), but in casual conversation she expressed these opinions, and I have no doubt they are correct, for those who have their hearts and minds given over to the Church and her alone; but I fear I am not one of these—long ago my choice has been fixed, and I only wait till a few more months have rolled over my Lucy's head, before I seal my fate, either one way or the other. All this, how-



ever, is strictly between ourselves, I tell you everything unreservedly; few men have a friend in whom they can so confide—but you are one in a thousand! An early answer as to the pew question. I know you will consent; it cannot signify where the prayers are said, so long as the church walls enclose you.

“In haste, my beloved friend,

“Your’s in a world of gratitude,

“ROBERT AYLMER.”

“P.S. Mostyn of Ackington is staying at the Castle, a noble fellow, but rather too *high-soaring* in views. He has inundated and rather puzzled me with books of his own school. Do not be afraid, I feel fire-proof.”

“So many a man has said who is now in the Church of Rome, my good fellow!” Erresford said to himself as he closed Robert’s letter, and opened the other. It was from the Countess; full of the organ from beginning to end; and impressing strongly on her son, the necessity of the new pew. “Anne has it so much at heart,” she concluded, “that if you refuse, it will seem like a personal opposition to her wishes.”

“There is no possible harm in an organ,” so wrote Cecil in reply to Robert, “or any harm in rebuilding us a pew; indeed, if you take away the old one, it is but *fair* (as we said in our school-days) to replace it. *Entre nous*, I do not suppose the Countess and Flora would like to put away all distinctions and sit down side by side with the worthy farmers, although poor Anne—but no, I will let her religious peculiarities rest in peace. Do not allow Mostyn to have a finger in the alterations; and mind, I strictly forbid any finery about the new chancel. A noble simplicity is what we should aim at in our churches; the heavy architecture and rigid purity of the Reformation should never be deviated from. Beware of Mostyn’s books, and Mostyn’s views. I entertain no respect for him; he would be much more *noble* in my eyes, if he walked straight over to Rome! In this polite nineteenth century, when each one professes to be more enlightened than his ancestors, I think instead of advancing in religion, we are fast going back to the thralldom of that yoke which our forefathers cast off, but to which now, so many of our clergy incline, and cause their people to

incline, the gentle yoke of Rome! One is bored by controversies on all sides, and bored with fooleries too.

“Young ladies turn their dressing-rooms into private oratories, and worship the long-coated gentry who hear their confessions. Ladies bordering on thirty eschew matrimony and form sisterhoods! Heigh-ho! what next?”

“But a truce to this. There will not be much fear of your taking a Romish dodge with such a wife in view—Aylmer, when you have won her, you may rejoice, for there is no flower so fair in Christendom; then cherish her and love her as you would an angel, if one came down to you! I am going to call on Miss Neville this afternoon, and shall get a peep of your ‘Fairie Queen,’ if she is not deep in Italian or the sweet melody of her dove-like voice. Fare-thee-well,

“Yours,

“CECIL ERRESFORD.”

“The Fairie Queen” was neither occupied with Italian nor singing when Cecil Erresford called, but sitting by the drawing-room fire reading. She had just come in from a drive.

and had thrown off her bonnet and mantle on a sofa. She rose when Cecil entered, and smiled a welcome. Her five weeks' residence in London had not changed her one whit, she was the same gentle, happy Lucy; her dress was altered, not herself. The elegant silk dress and pretty white bonnet wore no resemblance to the plain merino and straw bonnet in which she had roamed the hills and woods round Forsted.

"Deeply interested, fair *demoiselle*?" Cecil said.

"Not very, only rather amused; but what a lovely day it is, so bright and sunny! I have been wondering how home looks!" Lucy replied.

"You have not forgotten 'home' then?" said Erresford.

"Forgotten home! oh, Mr. Erresford!" replied Lucy, smiling at the possibility of such a thing.

"I suppose you hear very frequently from Forsted?" Cecil asked.

"Papa writes to us in turn, generally twice a week, and then I correspond with Lady Flora. I hear from her constantly."

“And what accounts does Flora give of herself?” said Cecil.

“She says she is very dull, and is longing for Easter to be over, that she may return to town.”

“Poor Flora!” sighed Erresford.

“Lady Anne has finished her altar-carpet and pulpit cushion, and Lady Flora says they are so very handsome, but very like those in the Roman Catholic churches abroad.”

“Where on earth does Anne intend to put that finery?” exclaimed Cecil laughing.

“In the church, I suppose,” replied Lucy simply.

“But will Robert allow her to put it there? That is the question,” said Cecil.

“Oh! Robert is so very obliging!” replied Lucy.

“People may sometimes carry their disposition to be obliging too far,” said Cecil thoughtfully.

“Do you think then that Robert would be wrong in allowing Lady Anne’s carpet to be put down?” asked Lucy.

“There is nothing wrong about it,” replied Cecil. “I only think it would be better if he

did not. Though I own, if I were in Robert's place, my gallantry would be sorely put to the trial in refusing the work of a lady's hands."

"Poor Lady Anne!" said Lucy in a compassionate tone: "Lady Flora tells me, she has become quite thin with fasting: she takes nothing but dry bread and fish, no wine, or anything that she is accustomed to? Do you not think this a pity, Mr. Erresford?"

"I do decidedly," replied Cecil, "a great pity, but Anne has a strong will of her own, and I cannot influence her. I wish I could."

"So do I," replied the tender-hearted Lucy; "it makes me sad to think about her. Lady Flora says, she visits the very poorest people, and works so hard that they never see her till three or four o'clock, and then she comes in quite exhausted." Lucy was very communicative, she could always converse unreservedly with Cecil: he was so frank, so open, and withal so kind, Lucy never feared him as she did other people.

And Cecil liked to hear her talk in that simple, trusting way, that he met with in no one else. "Does Flora mention

who have been staying at the Castle?" he asked.

"No one, but Lord Glendowan and a Mr. Mostyn, a clergyman who has preached three times at Forsted. Lady Flora says the people grumbled at his sermons, and Farmer Perkins went to Robert, and asked him to refuse his pulpit to Mr. Mostyn again."

"Quarrels in Forsted already!" exclaimed Cecil in a disappointed tone. "I heard nothing of this before."

Lucy coloured. "Oh, not quarrels!" she replied, fearing she had said too much in her eagerness to talk of Forsted. "I am sure Robert would never allow quarrels."

"Robert is so very peaceable, that people take advantage of him. I must go down to the Castle and fight his battles!" Cecil could not bear Lucy to look serious; so he continued in a playful tone, "we should number a large majority to support our vicar."

But Lucy still looked grave as she said, "I have been saying too much; please Mr. Erresford, do not let Lady Flora think I talked scandal."

"Oh! fairest and best of scandal-mongers!

I shall respect the race henceforth if you are its representative," exclaimed Cecil laughing.

Lucy blushed—"But you will not take any notice to Robert about Mr. Mostyn?" she asked earnestly.

"Do not alarm yourself, fair *demoiselle*. Robert has already mentioned Mr. Mostyn as a worthy individual, very clever—and I could add, but who fasts painfully and shaves the top of his head."

Lucy laughed, then said, "why does he do so, I wonder?"

"I must refer you to Anne, I am not learned in such ecclesiastical matters."

Miss Neville here entered the drawing-room and apologized for not coming in sooner; but the music-master had been with Maude, and she always superintended the lessons herself.

"We were wondering what had become of you. We have not seen you the whole of the week!" Augusta said this in a reproachful tone.

"I have many excuses to make," he replied: "press of Parliamentary business—and besides my steward required my presence at Hatchworth, where I remained three days"



“ We missed you very much in the Park,” said Augusta in a flattering tone.

“ Miss Neville has so many friends, she can scarcely miss one from their number,” Cecil observed.

“ You surely do not class everybody one speaks to as friends,” said Augusta, carefully placing her hands in the best point of view—letting them droop in a peculiarly effective way, often practised, but slightly difficult to accomplish successfully.

“ But surely, Miss Neville, few people have so many friends as yourself, even setting aside casual acquaintance ?”

“ Half the people you call my friends, care no more for me than the policeman passing on the other side of the street—acquaintances can be unlimited—but friends—only a few, a chosen few—whose tastes and ideas accord with our own. Some author tells us there is no name sweeter than that of friend !”—she said this in her most brilliant manner, and then looked at Erresford.

Cecil, however, happened to be contemplating a picture to him ever fresh and new, and that picture was Lucy. Politeness deterred

her from continuing reading, but interest in the story impelled her to half open and turn over the leaves. She did not consequently observe Cecil's gaze, but it annoyed her Aunt, who said rather imperiously, "Lucy, do put down your book, and find Maude; she cannot know Mr. Erresford is here."

Lucy coloured at being discovered, occupied with her book at a wrong time; and laying it aside, took up her bonnet and mantle, and went to seek Maude. Cecil held open the door and said, "I am quite curious to know what so much interests you."

"A story, Mr. Erresford, which I fear you would despise as childish," said Lucy smiling.

Miss Neville shrugged her shoulders and felt slightly jealous of her quiet little niece, and angry at Cecil's indifference to all her efforts at making him know how much she wished to number him among her chosen friends. Could it be that he resisted her charms, because Lucy had more attraction for him, simple Lucy? Impossible! Augusta answered herself, nevertheless she thought—I will break asunder any silken chains that

bind him to that child. I will tell him how entirely her heart is Robert Aylmer's.

"We have constantly news of Forsted," Augusta began.

"Yes! your niece was telling me so; she seems well versed in the local information."

"She has it from the fountain head," replied Augusta.

"I suppose the Squire is a capital informant: he takes such an interest in the neighbourhood."

"Oh! it is Mr. Aylmer, who is the principal correspondent. Lucy hears from him nearly every day." A slight stretch of imagination on Miss Neville's part, but *n'importe*, it was a matter of expediency; and she leant back in her chair, and waited calmly for Cecil to change colour, or otherwise evince his feelings on the important subject. To Augusta's surprise, however, he remained perfectly calm and only replied, "I suppose so."

Ah! she thought, the reason he so quietly takes it for granted, is their old brother and sisterly feeling; but I will divest him of that idea! "I have such a great feeling of pity for poor Mr. Aylmer," she said; "indeed I

cannot imagine how he solaces himself in Lucy's absence."

"Nor I. Poor fellow! he must be very dull," said Cecil.

"That kind of intimacy in early years, generally becomes something deeper in the end," she continued.

"What! Has Mr. Aylmer mentioned anything of the sort?" said Cecil earnestly.

"Just what I fancied!" thought Augusta. "Of course, Mr. Aylmer has not spoken to Lucy," she replied. "She is too young yet; she ought to wait at least a year."

"And in that year, may it not be probable that she meets some one who will outshine our friend Aylmer in her eyes?" asked Cecil, really for the sake of knowing how his friend's chance of success stood.

Poor man! thought Augusta. I do rather pity him! "There is not the slightest fear for Mr. Aylmer," she continued rather proud of her powers of discernment. "He is as secure of Lucy as though she were entirely his at this present moment. I know no one more constant and unchangeable than Lucy, and I

am sure she loves him thoroughly : that endearing name of 'little wife,' was quite prophetic, though I dare say at the time Mr. Aylmer used it first, he meant it innocently enough."

"Well, Aylmer and his little wife have my hearty blessing and best wishes," replied Cecil, in a tone so candid, that Augusta retracted her judgment, and thought he was not in love with little Lucy, after all when Lucy coming in with Maude, put an end to the conversation.

Cecil Erresford was right. There were quarrels commencing in Forsted, the worst of all parish quarrels, that between clergyman and people. Maude was right in those hastily uttered and quickly forgotten predictions, that the De Walden family would disturb the peace of their hitherto quiet little village. Five months had scarcely passed away, and lo ! the prediction was verified.

Cecil had not left the Castle a fortnight, before the mischief began. Lady Anne despatched a missive to the retired village of Ackington, where in a large old Elizabethan house, a number of clergymen had formed a

sort of brotherhood : they walked with bowed heads, meek faces and shaven crowns. And they fasted and worked ; and kept vigils and slept upon hard couches, and denied themselves every luxury, nay every comfort, and devoted themselves to a life of perpetual celibacy. Hubert Mostyn was the head, a kind of unacknowledged Abbot. Lady Anne had made his acquaintance in the Marchesa Elmo's saloons. An unaccountable medley of queer people she saw there ! However since the Lady Anne had taken up her residence at Forsted, her noble head had been full of plans for the conversion of Robert to her own wild views ; and to that end, she had conversed and argued but with small success. Now the Castle was devoid of guests, what should prevent her from bringing to her aid, the talented and subtle champion of her cause, that cause which was to unite under one banner the churches throughout the world ? Hubert Mostyn obeyed her summons. The servants at Castle St. Agnes, stared when he arrived, stared at his odd figure, his humble demeanour, and asked each other jokingly in the servants' hall, if this was the Lady Anne's

confessor? Yes, he was her confessor. In the quiet hour, when twilight clothed the library with mysterious shades, Lady Anne sat alone with the brother of St. Margaret's and unfolded her plans; opened her heart; told him of Robert's weak temperament, which could be moulded by any superior mind; spoke of Cecil's influence, of Cecil's absence; and gave into the hands of Hubert the conversion of St. Walburga's priest. No one only knowing Lady Anne in the drawing-room could have understood the fervour, the energy of her manner, or the reverent humility with which she implored Hubert Mostyn's aid.

Was the Lady Anne acting in a tragedy? Her heart was real, her voice real, all was real, and she would have denied it altogether, but Lady Anne was acting in a tragedy, and she performed her part so well, that when the curtain fell, the end was fearful! Mostyn promised everything, his aid, his prayers. The twilight had darkened into night, the fire alone threw its flickering flame around the oak-wainscotted room; the conference was over; and when the Lady Anne rose to depart,

a stealthy footfall broke on the stillness, but the Lady Anne was pre-occupied and heard it not, nor saw the dark-browed Italian enter her own room, and tell her beads, not humbly, but in triumph. And she triumphed yet again, when she heard how the brother Hubert in Walburga sounded forth, in melodious and wonderful words, a sermon which rivetted the attention of its hearers, a sermon in which Christ was cast aside, that the Church and the sacraments might be elevated, and good works, fasting and self-denial were spoken of as the means of bringing souls to Heaven. Agnese triumphed, but the farmers and those of the better classes who understood his meaning, for the first time in their lives, walked moodily out of church; and more moody were their looks, when the second Sunday, Robert reading prayers, the holy Hubert stood and knelt the service out, bending over the chancel rails, with his back to the whole congregation. The third Sunday, their English spirit was roused, when, on entering the church, Mostyn bowed low before the communion table. Several of the most influential members of the congregation waited on Robert and respect-



fully informed him, that if Mr. Mostyn preached the following Sunday, one and all would walk from the church!

Robert wished to oblige his parishioners, but dared not disoblige Lady Anne; dared not offend a brother clergyman, though in his heart he wished him back at St. Margaret's; and the fourth Sunday in Lent, an occurrence unheard of before by the simple villagers, took place in the quiet church of Forsted. When Mostyn in a strange, monotonous drawl began, his face devoutly turned towards the wall, to repeat the opening words of the Communion service, pew doors gently opened, and the tall, stalwart forms of the Forsted farmers walked softly down the aisle, and were seen no more that day in St. Walburga.

Poor Robert Aylmer was wretched, knowing what he ought to do, and yet not doing it; and so by indecision sowing the seeds of the first dissent in Forsted.

Why did Robert listen to those counsels which eventually terminated so fatally to himself? And why did Lady Anne come to Forsted to begin strifes which ended in a grave!

Robert was in the most awkward dilemma

he had ever known ; and without his trusty friend Cecil to help him out, he would have written to Cecil and laid the whole affair before him, but that Robert feared his censure. Would not Cecil have told him it was more politic to offend one man, and that comparatively a stranger, than to estrange from him the leading part of his parishioners ?

The Squire who not having been in church since his daughters left, had consequently only heard, not witnessed the Sunday excitement, came to Robert to enquire into its truth ; and when he heard all the reports substantiated, he told Robert rather angrily, if he chose to have such a Popish fellow officiating in his church, he deserved to lose every one of his parishioners except Lady Anne, who was all of a piece with the whole mischief-making thing. And the Squire added, she would stick to her foolery to the last !

“ I think you are unjust to me,” said Robert rather warmly. “ If you were in my place—”

“ If I were in your place,” interrupted the Squire, “ I should make a better parson. I would stick to my own pulpit in spite of what

any one wished, and then the people would stick to me. Lor! I would have done anything sooner than let those fine fellows be driven out of their pews. It is a shame and a disgrace!"

"Really, Sir, it is a pity you had not been in church to join your fine fellows!" exclaimed Robert, a little nettled.

"You may depend I would, if I had been there. The idea of the fellow bowing to the Communion table in that way! Why did you not tell him of it?"

"I think we had better change places, Sir; you take my gown, and I your red coat, as you seem to understand so much of church matters," replied Robert, who, though dissatisfied with himself, was angry with the Squire for interfering.

"When is that reverend shaven crown going back to his monastery?" asked the undaunted Squire.

"You had better put that question to him yourself, Sir, couched in precisely the same language as you put it to me," replied Robert, stirring the fire rather vehemently; for what with the Squire's questionings and his

own vexation, he felt anything but comfortable.

The Squire laughed, "Why, Bob," he exclaimed, "what is the matter with you?"

Robert was tumbling some coals into the grate, but he stopped as he replied, "You will own it is enough to annoy any man; as if those farmers could not have remained quietly, instead of leaving the church in dudgeon, and creating such a disturbance! Why could they not have borne patiently with Mostyn for a Sunday or two? They know his views and mine differ as widely as the Poles. I told them so; but as a guest at Castle St. Agnes, I could not turn him out of the church."

"And what did they answer to that?" asked the Squire.

"They commenced a pack of nonsense about supposing a Roman Catholic priest were staying at the Castle, was I to receive him? In short, they were dictatorial, and I felt if I gave way then, I should be giving up my clerical authority; and that I did not choose to do," replied Robert.

"Tut!" exclaimed the Squire. "I tell you

what, Bob, my idea of clerical authority, as you please to call it, is not giving way to a woman! Lady Anne rules the parish, not you!"

"How? I do not understand you."

"It is easily enough explained. Her ladyship is bent on making a set of papists of us all, and she cannot do it by herself, so she brings this monkish-looking fellow to help her; and between them, they frighten you into obedience to anything they choose to dictate."

"That is an idea of yours, Sir, and simply an idea, for I assure you, neither her ladyship nor Mr. Mostyn has ever dictated to me in any way. I tell you, I would not stand it if they did."

"Well, it's no affair of mine after all," muttered the Squire getting up from his seat. "By Jove, I must be off. I have been here a terribly long time. I am going over to old Mildmay's: he has got a horse to sell, a stunner! thorough-bred, but he asks a precious long sum. Take care of yourself, and don't get into any hotter water than you are already in!" The Squire shook hands heartily and

was gone ; Robert watching him from the gate.

“ I am in a pretty mess ! ” soliloquised Robert, as he took a turn or two down his garden. “ If I deny Mostyn the pulpit, it seems as if I feared the farmers ; and if I allow Mostyn to go on Sunday after Sunday, it will appear as if his views and innovations were agreeable to me. I almost wish I were anything but a clergyman ! In these days it is no easy thing to keep the peace ; but surely if a man has a church, he may allow whom he likes to officiate in it, without opposition from the laity ? ” And with that thought Robert went in to his dinner ; then ordering his horse, he went a long ride, taking care to keep far away from Forsted. It was not till dark that he returned to the parsonage, glad to have escaped a meeting with either of the contending parties. ‘ Contending parties ’ in Forsted ! This was indeed something new. Maude would have said those are the fruits of bringing new people into the village.

The next morning’s post brought a letter for Robert ; a letter from Lucy, very delightful to him, in the midst of his unpleasant feelings.

What did Lucy tell Robert that his face grew serious? Was she lecturing the reverend young gentleman on his duty to church and state, and the necessity for keeping out questionable churchmen? Let us read for ourselves.

“Dear Robert,

“There is a long Italian translation waiting for me, and I have yet to practise for my singing-master, but still I must find time to send you a short note. I was glad to learn from you all about the house, and how nicely it is getting on, and that the garden is not so much trampled upon as you fancied. But you do not know how grieved I am at some news of our dear old church. They tell me that quarrels have begun; that in the middle of the service several people left the church because of the strange things that were done in it! Oh! dear Robert, do prevent quarrels! Do take care of our little church! you can do it, it is your’s, Mr. Erresford has given it you. I know that you wish to be kind to every one, and how unhappy you must be to be obliged to take one side against the other—but, dear

Robert, take the side of those that are right ; I know you will. Since I have been in London I have learnt so much that is new, which I wish I had never heard—I mean all sorts of strange discussions about religion. Very young girls—even younger than I—talk about Puseyism. I scarcely know now what they mean, but at first I was so puzzled—and then I have been reading such strange books : they seem in the beginning very religious, but the characters in the books all quarrel about a church, I do not know what it is, but they call it Anglo-Catholic. It appears to me if people only kept to what the Bible tells them, no one need disagree. Dear Robert, let Forsted be a happy place, where every one loves each other, and let them look up to you as a peace-maker ! Auntie calls me, Maude's love and mine,

“ Your affectionate sister,

“ LUCY.”

What the farmers could not do, and Robert's own good sense could not do, the fair Lucy effected—she restored peace unto Forsted !

Robert pondered over her words—“ take



the side of those that are right"—and he felt that his parishioners were right in their disapproval of Mr. Mostyn's views; and he at length resolved that he should preach no more in St. Walburga. Mostyn bore Robert's refusal of his offers of further assistance with the air of a martyr—and seeing that for the present he was no longer of use to his dear brother, he took himself back to the twenty dear brethren to whom he was of use, and remained still and quiet, watching the signs of the Church! Lady Anne was truly grieved, and told Robert he was throwing away from him holy counsel; that such a friend as Hubert Mostyn was not often met with; to this Robert made no reply. At length, Lent passed. The Manor House was finished; the organ put up; and on Easter Sunday, Lady Anne doffed her mourning, and appeared in a splendid toilette in the Squire's pew; for the building the new chancel was delayed till the Countess and her family left the Castle, as the church must be closed during the alterations.

Lord Glendowan played the organ to the great satisfaction of the farmers, who so far from opposing, as Lady Anne predicted,

volunteered to pay for an organist. And so all things were again smooth, very smooth. The farmers doubled their Easter offerings as a recompense for their opposition on that memorable Sunday; and Robert, delighted at their peaceful feelings, gave them a dinner at which the Squire was present. Lady Anne sighed, and wrote a letter to the holy Hubert, in which she mourned over the miserable worldliness and timidity of St. Walburga's priest. And the holy Hubert wrote a consolatory reply, in which were these words: "Dear Lady, despair not; the very signs you deplore, are to me only so many beacons at which to light the torch of hope!"

## CHAPTER III.

“The world is full of fools; and sycophancy liveth on the foolish:

So he groweth great and rich, that fawning, supple Parasite.

Sometimes he boweth like a reed, cringing to the pompousness of pride,

Sometimes he strutteth as a gallant, pampering the fickleness of vanity.”

PROVERBIAL PHILOSOPHY.

LADY FLORA was in London. Archer had seen her pale, sad face, as the carriage which had met them at the railway station stopped in Park Lane: Archer had learned from Lucy the time the Countess was expected, and had purposely taken a late ride in the Park, and timed his return, so as to see them arrive. He passed slowly, with earnest gaze.

No one noticed him, save the Lady Flora: she coloured and smiled, then turned away—and Archer was content.

“Have patience,” he said to himself, “and you will win!” and with this he rode home; but he did not tell any one he had seen the Lady Flora, nor did Flora mention that she had seen Archer.

“Tell me, Cecil,” she said, some hours after, when conversing alone with her brother, “Is Lucy altered since she left her village home?”

“I do not think anything would ever change Lucy,” Cecil replied; then he added, “her father came up yesterday.”

“Yes, I know, we saw him before he left. Have you heard if he consents to Maude and Lucy remaining long in town?”

“Yes, Mr. Neville dined with me to-day at the Club, and he was uncommonly communicative. The good man’s heart seemed full of his daughters: he said his Lucy sang like a nightingale; and as to Maude, he could not understand what she said, but her Italian sounded to him like that of a native!”

Flora laughed.

“Mr. Neville is so unsophisticated!” she observed.

“So much the better,” replied Cecil, “I wish there were more Squire Nevilles in the world.”

“Well! but what does he mean to do?” asked his sister, with a little impatience.

“He says, they shall certainly remain in town. Maude’s heart is entirely set upon staying, and passive little Lucy is so delighted with her studies and her sister’s happiness, that she is content to remain; though I question if, in her heart, there are not secret unexpressed longings after Forsted.”

“Oh! Forsted is dull enough now, I am sure,” said Lady Flora. “You cannot possibly imagine how moped I have been the last two months, Cecil!”

“Oh, fie!” exclaimed Cecil playfully, “you to talk about being moped with Lord Glendowan there!”

“You forget, Cecil, he was away the first three weeks,” Flora replied, with an uncomfortable smile. “I was wretched enough then. You will allow Anne is no companion for me: she likes all those nasty, dirty, poor

children down in the village, far better than she does me. In fact I am not *holy* enough!" Flora added, shrugging her shoulders.

"Nonsense, Flora," said Cecil smiling.

"You may call it nonsense, if you please; but what is amusement to you in Anne, is anything but that to me. At the Castle, there was absolutely no one to speak to. Anne was out all day, and mamma was in her room with an influenza, and I wandered about like a ghost."

"But you had Mostyn?" said Cecil archly.

"Detestable creature!" exclaimed Flora. "Whenever I saw him coming down stairs, I did so wish he would fall over the balusters!"

"My dear Flora!" said Cecil.

"Well, he made Anne ten times worse than she was before. As to Mr. Aylmer, I despise him heartily; he obeyed Mostyn like a child! I know I pity Lucy."

"Why so, Flora?"

"Because it is perfectly clear that he will marry Lucy some day; and then a pretty life she will lead!"

“ You do not see things *au couleur de rose* to-night, Flora. Your journey has fatigued you.”

“ No, it has not ; but my temper is growing dreadfully sour. I seem to find satisfaction in grumbling over everything !”

“ And what does Glendowan say ?” asked Cecil.

“ Oh nothing ! he imagines I am perfection itself, of course,” replied Flora. “ I think, Cecil,” she added, lowering her voice, “ that I have discovered, when too late, that we have not one idea in common.”

Cecil gazed at her a moment in surprise. There was a distressed, unhappy expression resting on her face. “ Can it be possible, dear Flora, that you care for some one else ?” he asked kindly.

Lady Flora looked up hastily. “ Perhaps I care for Mr. Mostyn, or the Squire ?” she said with a forced laugh. “ No, no, Lord Glendowan is very good ; only occasionally, Cecil, I cannot forget his age. Do not remember what I have said ; I scarcely know myself sometimes.”

“ I should be very grieved, Flora, if I

thought you were unhappy in your engagement with Glendowan," said Cecil anxiously.

"But I am not," she replied impatiently; "besides now I am in town again, I shall be contented with you, Cecil, and Lucy—there is always brightness wherever either of you is present!" she paused, then laying her hand lightly on his arm, she said, "I do so wish, Cecil, that Lucy could be your bride; there is so much goodness in both, that were you united, you would be like angels!"

Cecil sighed. "Dear Flora, you are visionary," he said, as he stooped down and kissed her.

Flora twined her arm through his. "Cecil, you make every one so happy, you ought to have great happiness yourself. Could you not learn to love Lucy?"

"Learn! oh Flora! I should think it required no teaching to love such a pure, angelic creature!"

Flora was struck by his tone. "Then you do care for her, Cecil?" she exclaimed.

"Yes, I look on her as a dear and valued friend, or sister," and Cecil turned away.



“ A sister ! oh Cecil ! Why cannot you love her more than a sister ? Lucy must love you ! Robert is a cypher—a nothing compared with you—there would be no chance for him, were you his rival !”

“ Hush, Flora !” exclaimed Cecil gravely. “ I will be no man’s rival. Robert and Lucy belong as much one to the other as though they were already united.”

“ It is my turn to call you visionary,” said his sister, “ why, Cecil, they are not even engaged ?”

“ Not by vow, but by love. I tell you, Flora, I step in between no one’s happiness. However successful I might be—what would avail my former friendship, if I embittered the rest of Robert’s life ?”

“ Oh, Cecil ! you are over good ! but take care that Anne and Mostyn do not, between them, make Robert embitter Lucy’s !”

“ Flora, you are unsisterly to Anne,” Cecil replied.

“ It was Anne who first taught me to be so.” Flora walked away ; she was miserable, and she could not hide it—she had discovered in her solitude at the Castle that she loved

Archer, and yet she was the betrothed of Lord Glendowan! But Cecil did not guess this, discerning though he was: everyone had become accustomed to Flora's moods, and no one much heeded them. The next morning, the Squire had taken Maude out for a ride into the country, and Augusta had gone to keep an early engagement about a servant; and Lucy, not expecting visitors at so unfashionable an hour, was arranging some flowers her father had brought her from Forsted, when the door opened, and Lady Flora was announced. Lucy nearly upset a vase in her joy, and darting forward, threw her arms round Lady Flora's neck, and said how glad she was to see her again. Lady Flora kissed her several times, then holding her back a little, said; "I must look at you, darling, and see if you have grown."

"Not much, I am afraid," laughed Lucy.

"Yes, I really do think you are rather taller and stouter too; and you have actually got a pink shade on those fair cheeks! London suits you, darling?"

"Oh, yes! and Brighton, dear Lady Flora;

it was so delightful! There is such a beautiful sea, and we made such nice excursions while we were there!"

Flora was still gazing at her; "I think you intend to look like a child always, Lucy, in spite of four flounces."

"That is Aunt Augusta's taste," replied Lucy smiling. "Papa said we were grown such London ladies; he scarcely knew us, he quite makes fun of us I assure you, and calls Maude, 'ma'am,' in play, of course. Oh! Lady Flora, we were so glad to see dear papa again!"

"We took good care of him in your absence: he has not pined away."

"Oh, no! dear papa always looks well—and the house is finished. Papa says it is just the same, only cleaner."

"Yes, exactly the same," replied Lady Flora, "and so you remain in town?"

"Yes, for some time longer. Aunt Augusta intends to give a grand ball on Maude's birthday, and to keep mine with it."

"When will Maude be eighteen? I forget, dear."

"On the twenty-third of May, and my

birth-day comes on the twenty-ninth. Papa most likely will stay here till then ; or, at all events, if he has to go home before, he will return for Maude's ball—we all call it Maude's ball—Aunt has made a list of the company—two hundred people !” Lucy sighed, then laughing exclaimed, “ I shall lose myself in such a crowd !”

“ Oh, no ! you will be one of the stars of the evening, Lucy. Miss Neville will dress you beautifully, I know, she has exquisite taste.”

“ I shall try to get in a corner,” said Lucy, “ and watch the people, you and Maude, and those I love and care for most.”

“ You will not have time for that : every one will want to dance with you,” replied Lady Flora.

A carriage at that moment stopped at the door. Flora started, and became paler than usual.

“ Oh, it is only Aunt Augusta come back !” said Lucy. “ She went to Russell Square to get the character of a new maid.”

Only ‘Aunt Augusta,’ was it ? The door opened, and Archer entered. He had returned

early, imagining Lady Flora might visit Lucy that morning. He pretended, however, to look vastly surprised at seeing her; and poor Flora compressed her lips, and tried to fancy that she was not looking paler, and then talked quickly and nervously about their journey the day before.

“You had a cold, cheerless day,” Archer replied, as he stood opposite the sofa, with his hat in his hand. “April ought to bring smiles, not such frowning winter winds. I fear they do not suit you, Lady Flora. You do not look so blooming as when I had the pleasure of seeing you at the Castle.”

“The cold winds do not harm me,” replied Flora, holding Lucy’s hand tighter, “besides we ought not to complain; until this week the weather has been very fine for the season” — she spoke very fast, and with her eyes bent down.

“Have you got a holiday, Uncle?” Lucy asked.

“I wish I had,” said Archer smiling. “I just looked in on my way to Grosvenor Place. I thought it possible your Aunt might have returned, and I wished to speak

with her—but I am fortunate,” he added addressing himself to Lady Flora, “in arriving at this moment.”

Flora looked up and smiled a timid, uncomfortable smile, and thought earnestly for something common-place on which to converse. “Have you heard how Sir Edgar Tyrrel is?” she asked at length.

“The last accounts were better,” he replied in an indifferent tone.

“Sir Edgar is Robert’s Uncle? Is he not?” Lucy asked.

“Only his *half*-uncle,” replied Archer, laying great stress on the word ‘half.’

“I think he lives in Grosvenor Place; does he not?” said Lady Flora.

“Yes,” replied Archer, “he does; and that reminds me, Lady Flora, to make inquiries after Lady Damer.”

“Poor thing! I am afraid she will never recover: they are expected every day in town *en route* to Italy, where Lord Damer takes her as a last resource.” Flora then rose and said she must go, as she had shopping to do that morning. She intended to ask Lucy to accompany her, but

she feared being left with Archer while Lucy dressed; so she departed alone, and Archer handed her into the carriage, and said, what good it did him to see the Lady Flora again—and Flora felt angry with herself and him, and envied Lucy's calm, gentle looks. While Lady Flora was driving about from shop to shop, Lord Glendowan was walking to Grosvenor Place, and when there he rang at a door, and asked for Sir Edgar Tyrrel, and was forthwith ushered into a library, where an elderly gentleman reposed in a spacious elbow-chair, with a gouty foot carefully placed on a cushion. By his side sat an elderly lady, reading aloud the leading article of the 'Times.' They both appeared glad to see Lord Glendowan, Sir Edgar squeezing his hand rather more warmly than was totally agreeable. Lady Tyrrel vacated her seat next to her lord and master, in favour of her guest; and turning a spaniel off a *chaise longue*, sat down in it, and taking up two lengthy knitting pins, commenced casting on stitches at a great rate with a determined, clicking noise.

“Well, my Lord, I am mightily glad to see you,” began Sir Edgar, in a somewhat fretful tone. “I only wish I could rise to welcome you; but you find me a sorry useless log!”

“With better days coming!” replied Lord Glendowan cheerfully.

“My best days are over now,” rejoined the Baronet: “sixty years do not pass over a man without leaving unmistakeable signs. I have been a good-looking man in my day, but that is past now.”

“Sir Edgar always takes a gloomy view of every thing,” observed the Lady still clicking her needles.

“May you never have the gout to make you gloomy, my dear,” said Sir Edgar slowly. “And so, my Lord, you have come back to London again; and how is my Lady Flora?”

“Thank you, very well.”

“And when does the marriage take place,—still unfixed?” asked Sir Edgar.

“We contemplate this summer,” replied Lord Glendowan.

“The best time of year—could not be



better." Sir Edgar was very apt to become prosy.

"I suppose you saw our nephew while you stayed at Castle St. Agnes!" said Lady Tyrrell, ceasing the monotonous music of her needles.

"Yes, constantly," replied Lord Glendowan.

"Well, tell us about him," interrupted Sir Edgar. "What sort of parson does he make?"

"A very quiet, harmless one. He is one of those fellows that you cannot find fault with."

"Slow and dawdling, eh? He was so as a lad, at Eton;" said Sir Edgar.

"He is certainly not clever or sharp," replied Lord Glendowan; "but perhaps he is none the worse for that; not so likely to run into harm."

"I think he might look in now and then; he knows he would be welcome," said the Baronet.

Lord Glendowan rather questioned this; though of course he did not express the

thought, but only said, "Aylmer is so rarely in London."

"I suppose not. It is a snug little living, is Forsted," continued Sir Edgar. "I conclude Robert keeps his horse, and that sort of thing?"

"Erresford has lent him one; but out of two hundred and twenty pounds a year, you will own there is not much left for extra comforts."

"What kind of views has he got? New or old?" asked Sir Edgar.

"He is very moderate," replied Lord Glendowan: "even you, Sir Edgar would not be offended."

"My poor brother Harry! I wish we were on better terms with his son."

"We will invite him up," said Lady Tyrrell; "what do you say, Sir Edgar?"

"Not a bad idea! Sarah, I should like to see the lad; though, I must confess he disappointed me at Eton. It was that Eton business that offended his father; and Robert has always been shy of us since."

“It is the same with myself and Mildred,” said Lady Tyrrell. “I often think of her, though she behaved shockingly in marrying against my wishes.”

“That reminds me,” observed his Lordship anxious to put in a good word for the poor, portionless Aylmer, “a senior officer of Captain St. John, lately came home, and I met him accidentally in Scotland, a few weeks back. He speaks very highly of St. John and his wife. He mentioned them as the nicest couple he ever met, and the only people in the regiment who manage to live on their pay. Mrs. St. John is always happy and cheerful, in spite of hardships; for they have three children, and very little to keep them on; yet no complaint is ever heard.”

Lady Tyrrell looked at her lord. His will was yet unmade, and she thought he might put Mildred in a corner; but Sir Edgar’s only notice was; “ah, my dear! she had better have remained with you, and married that young banker you planned for her!”

“That is as she thinks, Sir Edgar. I own I was too hard on Mildred. I should be more

easy with her if I had my time to come over again."

"Which you have not, Sarah," said Sir Edgar, moving his gouty foot with a little groan. "I suppose Bob Aylmer has got some tender fancy," continued Sir Edgar, after a series of twinges. "All parsons turn that way directly they get sight of a living."

"Aylmer seems to have some predilection for the youngest Miss Neville," replied Lord Glendowan.

"Oh, that's it! is it?" exclaimed Sir Edgar, brightening up. "Little Miss Neville! well, he could not do better! The Nevilles are a good family. I like the Nevilles, her uncle is my god-son."

"Who, Archer?" asked his lordship.

"And a capital fellow he is, very clever, quite made himself in his profession—we shall see him judge some day! I mean to remember Archer handsomely in my will." Sir Edgar was very fond of his will, and liked to talk about it, though it existed only in idea.

“ I never can discover what you admire so much in Archer Neville,” observed Lady Tyrrell, rather querulously.

“ That is a point, my lord,” said Sir Edgar, “ that Lady Tyrrell and I do not agree upon. I am afraid we never shall. Lady Tyrrell has a prejudice.”

“ Which I fear I share,” replied his lordship.

“ The fact is,” continued Sir Edgar, without noticing Lord Glendowan’s observation, “ Archer is too clever ; not a ladies’ man enough. Never mind ; he makes money, and that is everything.”

Lady Tyrrell clicked her needles in a negative tone, as if she did not at all agree to this.

The conversation then turned upon politics ; and presently Lord Glendowan took his leave. As he was being shown out, a brougham stopped before the door, and Archer Neville alighted—there were only passing greetings between the nobleman and himself, and then the favourite god-son entered Sir Edgar’s library.

“Always welcome, Archer,” was the baronet’s exclamation; “as long as I have a roof over my head, I shall be glad to see you under it.”

“You are very good, Sir Edgar, and I am delighted to see you down again!” a story on Archer’s part, who hoped to have come to the making out of the long delayed will.

Lady Tyrrell, who had given Archer a very stiff welcome, put down her knitting-needles, and set herself to listen attentively to the conversation; though she would not own it even to herself, she was afraid of Archer; and persons we fear we generally also dislike.

“I have just had a visit from my Lord Glendowan, a nice good fellow, that!” said Sir Edgar; “and a very pretty lady, too, I hear he is to marry, though I have never seen her.”

“Never seen Lady Flora!” exclaimed Archer. “How is that?”

“Oh! pretty young ladies do not care for visiting useless old logs like me!” A “log” was Sir Edgar’s favourite simile for himself.

“I am sure, Sir Edgar,” said Lady Tyrrell, rather sharply, “it is your own fault, if you have not seen Lady Flora. She called on us several times last Autumn-year in Paris, only you were always out, and you forgot that last season you were only in town a very short time.”

“So she did,” muttered Sir Edgar. “We ought to know her. Let me see, Sarah, she will be related to us by-and-by—won’t she?”

“Scarcely related,” replied Lady Tyrrell.

“Well, I don’t know what you call it; but Glendowan’s sister married your nephew—so Glendowan’s wife must be related.”

“A distant connection, perhaps,” observed Lady Tyrrell.

“Well, it is all the same thing,” Sir Edgar answered; “and so, talking of relationships, there is something of the kind coming about between your pretty little niece and my poor brother Harry’s son, Rob. Aylmer.”

“Indeed!” said Archer, “this is the first I have heard of it.”

“That is strange! Is it not, Sarah?”

“Not exactly strange, Sir Edgar: young

people often keep those things very quiet," Lady Tyrrell replied.

"Bob is meditating nothing clandestine, I hope. I would strike him for ever from my will, if he made a Gretna Green mess of it," growled Sir Edgar.

"Not an unlikely thing, if it happened at all," said Archer, quietly.

"How—what do you mean?" exclaimed Sir Edgar, starting. "Surely you can prevent that kind of thing—your niece is staying under your roof?"

"My dear Sir," said Archer with great composure, "do not agitate yourself, it is highly injurious."

"Oh, let me alone!" replied Sir Edgar, impatiently, "and tell me what that boy is going to be about."

"Nothing at present, I imagine. Lucy's regard for him is merely sisterly—they have been companions from their childhood."

"You think that is all," said Sir Edgar, looking a little disappointed, "I thought I should have liked to leave a nice remembrance for Mrs. Aylmer, if she had been that pretty



little Miss Lucy your sister brought her here one day, and I was quite charmed with her."

"I do not think Aylmer has a chance," replied Archer. "I know Mr. Erresford admires Lucy extremely; and my brother would be a great fool not to encourage such a good thing for his daughter."

"Dear me! as if the Aylmers were not just as good a family!" remarked Lady Tyrrel, in rather an offended tone.

"In point of date they are certainly an older family," replied the politic Archer; "but recollect, my dear Madam, that every father would naturally prefer a rich landed gentleman, to a poor country clergyman; besides, clergymen make such dangerous husbands in these days."

"How! what are you talking about?" exclaimed Sir Edgar.

"I only reverted to the strange mania our clergy have just now, for becoming Roman Catholic priests; and in that case, what becomes of their wives?"

"Why, they put them into convents, the rogues!" exclaimed Sir Edgar. "But

surely Bob Aylmer is not inclined that way! If I thought that—”

“My dear Sir Edgar,” interrupted Lady Tyrrel, “you heard what Lord Glendowan said, and you know his opinion is always to be relied on.”

“What did Lord Glendowan say of our friend Aylmer?” asked Archer, with one of those bland, courtly smiles that Lady Tyrrel hated more than frowns.

“He says, Robert’s views are perfectly sound, and that he is not likely to get into harm.”

“I am afraid the farmers of Forsted would tell a different story,” said Archer. “Lord Glendowan is a most upright, truthful man, but likely to form wrong opinions on account of his good-nature, which leads him to think well of every one.”

“An excellent trait in his lordship’s character, and one which other persons would do well to imitate!” observed Lady Tyrrel dryly.

“Wait, Sarah; I want Archer to tell me about the farmers of Forsted, what is

that, eh?" said Sir Edgar, in an impatient tone.

"Nothing, perhaps, of any consequence," he replied; "only they were slightly offended by some little indiscretion on our friend Robert's part."

"Go on, I want to hear — some fine new-fangled ways, I suppose!"

"Something of the kind. The farmers took the alarm, and left the church in the middle of the service."

"Serve him right," said Sir Edgar. "I will have no turn-coats in my will. I am a churchman of the old school; and papists shall not finger my gold!"

"But we must not be too hard on the young and ardent," said the crafty Archer.

"He is old enough to know better, I am sure. I suppose old Forsted church is to be altered to suit his views, eh?" asked Sir Edgar.

"I believe alterations are commenced, suggested by a brother clergyman from Ackington."

"Not from St. Margaret's?" exclaimed Sir Edgar.

“Yes! there is a kind of brotherhood there; and the head of them has been staying at Forsted, I believe,” replied Archer.

“That’s Mostyn, Sarah, Hubert Mostyn! Robert is dabbling in that set is he—that is enough! I have heard enough of them from Hubert’s father, who is one of my oldest friends.”

“But surely—” began Archer.

“No, say no more—say no more,” interrupted Sir Edgar, putting out his hand. “I have heard enough—my gold shall not go to buy crosses and keep monasteries.”

Lady Tyrrel was going to speak, but Sir Edgar said, “Spare your words, Sarah, I will have no dealings with papists: you know me.”

Lady Tyrrel thought she ought to know him by that time, and that he was completely governed by Archer.

“St. John has got his promotion,” Sir Edgar resumed.

“And is likely to do very well,” replied Archer.

“You are mistaken,” said Lady Tyrrel,

“poor Mildred has quite a struggle, and has three children to keep.”

“But St. John, my dear Lady Tyrrel, is so well connected,” said Archer; “his aunt, who married an Italian Marquis, is now a widow with an immense property at command—St. John must have it all eventually.”

“Then they want for nothing,” muttered Sir Edgar.

Lady Tyrrel saw it was useless to interfere just then, so she was silent and let Archer have his own way. What was Archer's own way? Why, an intriguing, grasping one. Sir Edgar was his godfather, and Sir Edgar had promised to remember him handsomely in his will. Now on the morning when Archer had seen Lord Glendowan for the first time at the corner of Chancery Lane, Sir Edgar had been with him and mentioned this promise—then a bold idea entered his head: why not some day obtain possession of all Sir Edgar's fortune? A little tact, a little well-timed prejudice against Robert Aylmer and the property might be his,

though Robert was the nearest relation—it is true, Lady Tyrrel had nephews and nieces, but they were all *bien plantés*; and it was a matter of small import to them where the fortune of their uncle went. But it was of great consideration to Archer, what should become of the accumulated wealth of his parsimonious godfather, who though in ill health, had yet his will unmade. Now the two ideas which floated ever uppermost in his heart, above a sea of minor wishes and plans, were the two for which he now lived—the winning the Lady Flora and Sir Edgar's Tyrrel's fortune. Both he deemed essential to him, both he would have—it signified little that Sir Edgar had promised to remember him *largely* in his will—it was not a portion, but *all* that his hand grasped after—*all*! Then, what should prevent him from purchasing a proud estate and living like the highest noble of the land? And the Lady Flora should be his bride—with all her wealth, her ancient name and rank! Archer might then look down on the world, and live in the fulfilment of his high, proud

schemes. Sir Edgar was an old man, broken in health. Archer possessed considerable influence over him; and the way into Sir Edgar's will seemed clear; but his other scheme was more daring, and consequently required more skill. He must throw himself frequently into the society of Lady Flora, yet appear to the world indifferent to her presence, while he secretly and by degrees told his love. Without this he could never win; for were his admiration to be open, farewell to all his plans! Mr. Neville, with neither rank nor power, would never be permitted by the proud Countess to supplant the high-born future son-in-law, upon whom she looked with such complacency.

## CHAPTER IV.

“ I did hear you talk  
Far above singing ; after you were gone,  
I grew acquainted with my heart, and searched  
What stirred it so ! Alas ! I found it love.”

LADY FLORA sat particularly thoughtful and abstracted one morning. The Countess spoke to her several times without receiving any answer ; and when at length her attention was aroused, she started and answered in a painfully confused manner.

“ My dear Flora, what makes you so *distracted* ?” the Countess exclaimed impatiently. She was sitting opposite her daughter at a table in the library writing, while Flora was busying herself in refilling her envelope-box and card case.



“Mamma, I did not intend to be so,” she replied timidly.

“I thought you had overcome those dreamy fits. Pray do not encourage them again, they are so absurd !”

Flora answered, “Very well, mamma,” in a submissive tone.

“What could you have been thinking of?” the Countess continued laying down her pen.

“Nothing, mamma,” Flora said, while the colour rose indignantly to her cheeks. At the age of three-and-twenty, it seemed strange she must explain her thoughts.

“It is nonsense, Flora, to say that nothing occupied your mind ; such a silly answer. You can have no idea how ridiculous it sounds !”

Flora made no reply ; the Countess resumed her writing ; Flora stooped over her envelopes, and a large scalding tear fell among them.

“Glendowan rides with you this morning, does he not, Flora?” the Countess asked without looking up.

“No, mamma, not to-day. He will be entirely taken up with his sister.”

“That reminds me, you ought to call on Lady Damer.”

“I intend, mamma, to go this afternoon.”

“The morning would be far less ceremonious,” said the Countess. “Glendowan will think it more attentive.”

“But, mamma, Lucy Neville has promised to call for me to walk with her this morning.”

“I like the Nevilles extremely,” replied Lady De Walden, “but really, Flora, you should not be perpetually making engagements with them. It is provoking just now; however, you can call after your walk on Lady Damer.”

“As you please, mamma,” replied Flora, and another tear fell.

This time it was not unnoticed by the Countess. “What are you crying for, child?” she exclaimed; “really, you tire my patience! Is Lucy Neville so much to be pre-

ferred to Lady Damer, that you must actually shed tears, because I wish you to shorten your walk with her, to give more time to Lord Glendowan's invalid sister?"

"It was not that, mamma," replied Flora.

"Then what was it? my dear Flora. I do not want to dictate, but you do not evince sufficient feeling towards Lady Damer. Remember, she is to be your sister."

Flora shuddered slightly.

"Are you cold, Flora?" asked the Countess.

"No, mamma," replied Flora, who by this time longed to cry outright; but she suppressed the longing, and her throat ached painfully.

"My dear, there must be something the matter. If you look like this, I shall send for medical advice. It is quite wearing to see you so melancholy,"

"Mamma, I am not ill, indeed, mamma!" poor Lady Flora's voice was so imploring.

"Very well, my dear, but do not agitate yourself; really I am afraid to speak: everything disturbs you, even such a simple thing

as my wishing you to make your visit to Lady Damer an hour earlier !”

Lady Flora sighed deeply. The Countess hated sighing ; and fearing another reprimand, Flora hurriedly left the room. When the door was closed, the Countess shrugging her shoulders, ejaculated, “ Poor child ! what a temper !”

If the Countess had only followed Flora to her room, she might have changed her opinion. It was something worse than temper ; it was real sorrow that rested on that young, pensive countenance, as Lady Flora rocked to and fro in a low, easy chair, only pausing ever and anon, to wipe away her fast falling tears. But she could not check them, and her grief each moment increased—“ I can bear it no longer,” she almost sobbed aloud. “ I am more miserable, more wretched, than any one in this world ! I know I am ! oh ! I wish I were dead !” She covered her face with her hands. “ Two months more—then, oh cruel mother ! oh cruel sister ! When that time arrives, to what will you have driven me ?” Flora almost shrieked aloud. “ Driven me to utter one great falsehood, one great deceit ! To

love him for ever, till death part us ! It will be false ; I do not love him. I cannot love him ! I never did—and now—oh, miserable me !”

Again she rocked to and fro to endeavour to calm herself ; for Lucy would come, and Lucy must not see her in this grief. And as she calmed her sorrow, a voice from within seemed to ask her why she ever accepted Lord Glendowan ? He was then the same as he is now. “Flora,” it said ; “he has not changed—’tis you.” But she answered herself, that it was compulsion that caused her to accept him : she took refuge in Lord Glendowan, from her mother’s cold looks, and her sister’s haughty words ! Flora was, indeed, very unhappy ; the month she had been in town had changed her. Though she had never really loved Lord Glendowan, she had respected him and found pleasure in his society. Now it was repulsive to her—his every little eccentricity was magnified ; his conversation wearied ; his affection distressed her—and yet she bore it all with apparent composure ; bore it from necessity, for she dared not brave her stern mother’s anger,

should she reveal her real feelings ; and yet at times, when she thought of Lucy Neville, and her open, lovely truthfulness, she blushed at her own deceit.

Why, when night after night, Lord Glendowan took her to concerts, where she would rather not have been, and claimed her attention to music she did not care for ; wearied her with his remarks, and made her ashamed by his conspicuously loud applause and perpetual beating time, which attracted the attention of all around ; why did she not honourably tell him, that she retracted her promise, and implore him to allow her to be once more free ; and then bear the anger of the Countess patiently and resignedly ? Her heart died within at the thought. A childhood of neglect—should it be followed by a youth of reproach and scorn ? She had not courage to bear it—had not courage to stand quailing before her mother's cold glance, while she told how she had never loved Lord Glendowan ; but that now every pulse of her heart beat and vibrated with a new and intense emotion—hitherto unknown—a love for one, that

mother's cold glance would tell her, might never win her!

Night after night they met. A few low whispered words, whose meaning she could scarce comprehend; a silent pressure of the hand; and that was all that had passed between the Lady Flora and Archer; yet this sufficed. She trembled when he approached, and when he was gone, her heart was drear and blank; she felt life was not worth living for! She might scarce think of him, she might scarce look at him, for watchful, loving eyes were ever about her, watchful, yet trusting her implicitly. In Glendowan's heart deceit never entered—it was true, open as the clear day; and so he dreamt of it not in others, least of all in her he so loved, that she seemed to him the soul of purity and goodness.

The Lady Flora did not pray that she might resist temptation; but she prayed that she might die soon: the world was weary to her! Then, just as this dreadful murmur passed her lips, some one knocked, twice, thrice, ere she heard it; then she started up. A glass stood before her, and

it reflected to her view, her own troubled, tearful countenance. She hastily composed herself, then said, "Come in."

Lady Flora thought it was her maid, but it was Lucy Neville who knocked, and she stood a moment on the threshold like a picture set in a frame.

"Oh, Lucy, is it you? come in." Flora's voice partook of the nature of her thoughts—its tones were hollow and full of suppressed grief—and the fair young face was lifted in looks of astonishment, blended with compassion: an angel on earth could scarce have worn an expression freer from earth's passions, and beaming with more exquisite love.

"Dear Lady Flora, have I come too early? The Countess sent me to find you,"

"You are always welcome, dear Lucy." Flora placed her in her own arm-chair. "Sit there, dearest child; I will put my bonnet on directly, you have come to walk?" Flora sighed deeply, and Lucy looked again wonderingly at her.

"Dear Lady Flora, you would rather not walk to-day perhaps; you look ill."



“Yes, I shall like a walk; I am tired out by late hours, and it will revive me.” Flora tied her bonnet-strings in an impatient manner. “Lucy, dear,” she said rather abruptly as she turned towards her and fixed on her a sad, troubled gaze, “Lucy, tell me, what is it makes you always so happy?”

It was a strange habit people had of enquiring of that fair, innocent child, the cause of her unclouded happiness!

“Oh! I cannot help being happy,” Lucy replied, colouring at the sudden question, then after a pause, she added; “every one is so kind, and this is such a beautiful world! On these bright, sunny days, I feel so glad, I could sing for joy.”

“How different you are from me!” said Flora sadly. “I was just thinking what a weary, troublesome world it was. A short life, full of heart-achings and tears, and then the world has passed from our sight!”

A slightly puzzled look strayed a moment on Lucy’s brow; but it was soon gone, and then with a sweet smile she said:

“Oh! dear Lady Flora, this is a world to make us thankful! Look at the sky, so blue, so

very lovely ! It might have been always dark and cloudy, and the sun might never have shone, but have been always hidden ! God might have made one continued winter ; no beautiful summer ; no flowers and green leaves !” Lucy paused and looked up appealingly ; but Lady Flora gave no reply, and she went on in her childlike, simple way. “ Even here, dear Lady Flora, even in London, there is something beautiful. There are no hills, no green meadows, but there are the waving, shady trees in the park, and we have the same sky everywhere, and we can look up and think of the Heaven that lies beyond, where the angels live.”

“ All these thoughts come easily to you, Lucy, because you are so good,” replied Lady Flora. “ I wish — oh, so ardently ! that I could be you just for one single day, to see the world as you see it, and think the thoughts that occupy your mind.”

“ Oh ! Lady Flora, do not wish that ! for sometimes I have such discontented thoughts. I wish I could be at Forsted instead of here, and walk in the fields, and watch the sunset, instead of going out to

parties and coming home tired; and sometimes I feel jealous of Maude because she is not always near me, as we were at home."

"My sweet child, is that all?" said Lady Flora, sadly.

"I do not wish for worse thoughts, Lady Flora; and they do not last long; they pass away directly I begin to think who sends me everywhere, and plans my days for me, as well here as at Forsted. We must be happy if we remember that our Father in Heaven, who cares even for the sparrows, watches over us."

Flora turned away. "If we are loved," she said, "it makes everything appear different: life is worthless, unless people love us."

"But God loves us always, Lady Flora; when everything else fails, that love is lasting."

"Yes, for good people;" murmured Flora.

"There is love enough for every one," said Lucy, with a trusting beaming look.

"No, not when we do wrong," observed Flora.

"If we are sorry for it," said Lucy, gently.

“If we are sorry and improve,” replied Flora; “but not if we go on in the same way again, and never do right.”

“I wish you would not think so,” said Lucy. “Just try to think about God’s love, and forget everything else. This will not seem a troublesome world then.”

The timid, quiet Lucy had made such a great effort in comforting her friend, that the tears actually stood in her eyes, though there were smiles on that sweet face in spite of them. Flora Erresford rarely kissed her mother or sister—she dared not; but she threw her arms round Lucy’s neck, and her lips pressed long and warmly that pure, fair brow. And there, in that quiet room, they promised to love each other as long as they lived. Flora was calmed; the lovely holiness of Lucy had hushed her troubled thoughts: she did not wish now to die. They were both young, and death seemed so far off, as to be a mere old wife’s fable. Flora tried hard the rest of that day to remember Lucy’s gentle words, and to take Lucy as her example. It was no easy task to bear calmly with the Countess’s dictatorial, impatient

manner ; or when with Lady Damer to listen to her complaining, fretful conversation, or sympathise with a long list of imaginary maladies. Poor Lady Damer belonged to that class who are a plague to themselves and every one who comes near them ; the class of *malades imaginaires*. Her late illness in Scotland had been nothing very serious, but she insisted that she was dying, and terrified all around her. Lady Damer was a young woman, and only a few years Flora's senior ; but she had married a man twice her own age, and she told Lady Flora that day in confidence, that she never ceased to lament her mistaken alliance. " His Lordship is all amiability and kindness," Lady Damer said, " but he is no companion for me. The entire want of sympathy between us, has preyed upon my spirits, and made me what I now am." Flora listened patiently, and tried not to think of Archer ; tried to think how different she would be from Lady Damer ; and how she would do her utmost to learn to love Lord Glendowan as she felt sure he deserved. Lord Glendowan's heart was gladdened that day : he wished, perhaps, that there had been

less of respect in Flora's manner, and more of real affection. But Flora was endeavouring to please him, and her efforts could not fail to be successful. It was the first time she had really tried ; and the novelty of subduing her own inclinations was occupation to her disturbed mind, and made her feel happier. But alas ! that evening, all her new formed plans were frustrated. A *soirée* was held at the house of Lady Howard, sister of the Countess. She was a person of great talent, and assembled around her all who were distinguished, not so much by rank as by kindred talents. She had promised Flora, whose sketches charmed her, that she should meet artists of note, and Flora's evening prospect was agreeable. Lord Glendowan would not accompany her. A previous engagement prevented him ; the Countess was unwell : Lady Anne from home, passing a few days with friends out of town. Cecil alone was her companion ; and for once Flora expected enjoyment. The rooms were crowded, the company learned. Flora was not *au fait* in brilliant conversation ; the array of talent rather dismayed her ; and her eyes mechani-

cally glanced around, to see, if perchance they might light on some familiar face. They lighted on a face very familiar, too much so for her peace of mind! Archer Neville, his arms folded, his face composed and passionless, conversed with the noble hostess. Lady Flora held a bouquet of lovely flowers, the gift of Lord Glendowan. She hastily raised them to her face; her hand shook, as she tried to still the beating of her heart—a moment, and the tremulous feeling was past, and Flora rejoiced in the thought that she had command over herself. She looked very pale but perfectly self-possessed, as she listened to the brilliant remarks on paintings, light and shade, colouring and artistic effect—old masters and new—strange Pre-Raphaelites and glorious gems of by-gone painters whose names are for ever immortalized, from a connoisseur like herself in love with the art which perpetuates and keeps alive, from century to century, memories of all countries and nations: monarchs, statesmen, palaces, monuments long since crumbling in the dust of ages. What made Flora start, raise her bouquet and stoop over it, apparently absorbed in its delicious

fragrance? Her enthusiastic artistic acquaintance drew back to give place to Archer! He shook hands with Lady Flora, and congratulated himself on the pleasure of meeting her, in a way that any one as well acquainted might have done. Then Archer, with great tact, apologized for interrupting an interesting conversation, and learning the subject, joined in where it had broken off. Flora never knew before how well he understood painting, and wondered at his knowledge of the private galleries in London; where Lord M— had the best Raffaele—and Lady F— had given so much for a Vandyke, and the Marquis of G— had a Correggio which he had purchased from so and so—who, in his turn, had obtained it at some valuable sale. And so Flora found herself forgetting her trepidation in the fascination of Archer's brilliant conversation—her artistic acquaintance also seemed interested, for he stood a long time with them, but after a while he left them. Lady Flora and Archer stood confronting each other one moment silently; the next Archer had offered her his arm, and invited her into Lady Howard's own boudoir to



see a master-piece of Paolo Veronese, he had purchased for her, and which had only been hung that morning. It was not without a misgiving that Flora suffered him to lead her away from the crowded rooms, through an antechamber. As he lifted a heavy curtain, a cool refreshing air came. He dropped the curtain which hung before the door, and they were alone; and standing before the life-like painting. Then Archer looked at Flora, a passionate, speaking look, as he exclaimed: "Oh, blessed solitude! that crowd, that din of voices, how hateful! feelings suppressed, words hushed—and here in solitude, one is free!"

Lady Flora glanced around the walls and tried to look as though she heard not; and Archer again broke forth: "Yet, Lady Flora, even in the crowd, it is a refreshment to meet, a delight, a joy. A half-hour near you, within sight of your smile, within sound of your voice—shall I tell you? it is to my heart, a joy no words can express!"

The face Flora bent down was colourless; the hand she withdrew hastily from his arm trembled; and the voice was scarcely audible,

but it said falteringly. "Hush, Mr. Neville! oh, spare me! I cannot, I may not hear this!"

"But say, Lady Flora, only tell me, were you free, would you then silence my heart's outpourings?"

"Mr. Neville, this is cruel; you take advantage of me, because I am alone, because"—she added striving to put firmness in her tone—"because Lord Glendowan is not with me."

"Lady Flora, I am daring—I know it. I feel it, but I must be daring; my life, my happiness, my all, depend upon you—you hold all in your hands—a smile, a hurried word cannot suffice me; I want more than this. Oh! Lady Flora, you are all to me that is worth living for, you are the centre—the one guiding star of my life!"

Lady Flora moved towards the entrance curtain. Her step faltered, Archer flew to her side—"Oh! you cannot, you must not go. Grant me this moment—but one moment longer to plead my cause!"

Flora paused and grasped a chair near her. "You can have nothing to say that I may hear," she almost whispered. "Mr. Neville,

such words are not for me. Grieve me not with more. I tell you, I must not listen!"

"Oh, beloved Lady Flora!" he exclaimed, "I can, I must save you! Will you throw your precious self on one you do not love?"

Flora interrupted him tremblingly. "Mr. Neville," she said, "this is presumption! Do you insult me because I am alone?" She walked quickly towards the curtain, lifted it hastily, and passing through the antechamber, mingled with the crowd, when a sudden murmur, a sudden movement, and there was a cry of "Make way—air!" And on Archer Neville's guilty ear, fell the words: "A lady has fainted!" An hour after, as Archer left the crowd, and passed out into the street, he saw Cecil support into his carriage, the pale and drooping form of Lady Flora.

## CHAPTER V.

“Oh sieh mich an! Sieh nicht weg, holder Engel!”

SCHILLER.

“Oh! how I have desired  
To tell thee all my heart; on bended knee  
To plead my cause!—my fate is in thy hands;  
And since thou hast such pity of my pain  
As thus to listen to me, may I hope  
Thou wilt be better still.”

Not a little surprised was the Countess to hear of Flora's sudden illness—Flora, who was never ailing, who never even complained of head-ache—to faint so suddenly—what could it mean? Cecil thought it was easily accounted for; he told his mother, the heat of the rooms was stifling; and instead of being surprised at Flora becoming unwell, his only wonder was, that more

young ladies did not faint. He thought it was a shame to overcrowd rooms in such a manner; and when he gave a reception, he would see himself to the ventilation! Cecil's explanation satisfied the Countess: she could bear hot rooms with impunity, but she knew every one could not; and when she heard from Flora that she had not quite lost consciousness, and that she recovered quickly, she ceased questioning, and left poor Flora in peace. Flora wished Lord Glendowan would have done so, but when at mid-day she made her appearance with heavy eyes, and a pallor over her countenance, then began a series of attentions, kindly meant and trifling in themselves, and yet Lady Flora was not in a mood to bear them patiently. Lord Glendowan insisted that her head ached, though she assured him to the contrary—insisted on piling cushions in her chair from all parts of the room; placed her feet on a footstool and then established himself close by her side to fan her, and bathe her forehead with Eau-de-Cologne; all the while upbraiding himself with having left her the

previous evening ; and questioning her over and over again as to her unfortunate fainting-fit. The season would soon pass, he said, and then he consoled her with a description of the quiet home awaiting her in the Highlands. She tried to appear interested, but could not succeed, when her heart was full of vexation, grief and misery. Again and again did her troubled thoughts recur to the scene in the boudoir. What had she said ? Did she repel him sufficiently ? Had she maintained her dignity so fully, as to prevent all further advances ? Yet why must she cast off Archer ? Was he not talented, admired, brilliant ? Did not her whole heart love him, as passionately as he had said he loved her ? The reverie was painful ; it vanished at the soft touch of Lord Glendowan, as he tenderly bathed her forehead with the delicious perfume. She started and met his glance so full of affection and sympathy, that her heart smote her. Was she going to deceive this noble one by marrying him, when all her love was another's ! A Highlander below the window was singing in a pathetic

voice "Auld Robin Grey!" She could bear it no longer. Her self-imposed fortitude gave way, and she wept passionate tears; and when Lord Glendowan in distressed tones enquired wherefore, she could not tell, and added to deception, falsehood. She said, she wept because she was ill!—

"Did you see Lady Flora in the Park to-day?" Maude asked her Aunt that evening. For a wonder they were alone, a quiet family party.

"I did not observe her," replied Miss Neville.

"She looked like a ghost!" Maude continued, "so white and ill—with great dark marks under her pretty soft eyes!—I wonder what is the matter with her?"

"She has over-fatigued herself, I suppose!" Augusta replied in an indifferent tone.

"And no wonder!" said the Squire in a sleepy voice. "It is enough to do up a *man*, such a lot of dancing!—I am sure Maude must have gone over miles of polka, last night!"

Maude laughed. "But Lady Flora was

only at a quiet *soirée*. Were the rooms very warm, Uncle Archer?"

"Very much so," he replied, without raising his eyes from the book he was reading.

"I wish people would let in more air. I made Captain Rippon open a window by me last night. It was quite delightful to find a breeze playing over me!" said Maude.

"Foolish child!" exclaimed her father. "I suppose you want a taste of rheumatism. Well," he added, "I shall be glad when all this folly is at an end, and I have got you both safe home again."

"You must not take us away, papa, till every party is over," said Maude, coaxingly; "it would be so tantalizing to leave in the height of the gaiety. I do so delight in the dancing and the operas; and then the *fêtes* that are to come! It will all be subject to think of for months after it is over!"

"For *years*, I hope," said the Squire; "what do you think, Lucy, little woman?"

"Hush, papa! Lucy is asleep!" said Maude, lowering her voice a little as she



looked lovingly at her sister, who was lying on the sofa and resting in Maude's arms.

"I am not asleep, Maude, dear. I heard all you said."

"You naughty, deceiving little thing! to lie so still, with your eyes shut!" and Maude kissed her.

"Lucy-bird, we want your opinion," said the Squire. "Which is the best—London or Forsted?"

"Oh, Forsted!" exclaimed Lucy, her fair face lighting up.

"Come along back then, little woman," said the Squire.

Lucy kept tight hold of her sister's hand, as she replied, "not without Maude, papa."

"So you are all in love with the gaiety too! Well, fine times!" exclaimed the Squire merrily.

"Oh, papa, I do not care for the gaiety at all! Indeed, I intended to ask Aunt Augusta to let me stay at home sometimes; but I like the singing lessons, and the concerts, and seeing Maude and Auntie dance."

“What a little contents you, Lucy!” said Augusta, putting down her embroidery.

“That is more than a little, Auntie,” said Lucy; “but may I remain at home sometimes?” she added, proffering her intended request.

“Certainly, dear, if you please, but you would be so dull alone.”

“Oh, no, Auntie! you do not go till very late, and then I am never dull; there is so much to think about now. The music, and visitors, and drives—and then I should be dreaming,” she added, laughing, “long before you return!”

“I hope we shall be Lady Flora’s bridesmaids,” exclaimed Maude, pushing back her hair, and looking at herself in an opposite mirror.

“When is her Ladyship going to enter the holy estate?” asked the Squire.

“In July. Lady De Walden has fixed it somewhere about the eleventh; but you never saw any one so unconcerned about it as Lady Flora. She has not even chosen her bridesmaids, though the Countess has planned their

dresses—all white, with no bonnets—something lovely the wedding will be!”

Archer shifted his reading lamp, and turned it down, though it was not flaming.

“Oh! darkness visible, uncle!” Maude exclaimed. “I do so wish we had gas in the drawing-rooms.”

“Aunt Augusta studies the becoming,” said the Squire, archly.

“Of course she does!” said Augusta laughing.

“Uncle Archer, you cannot be reading by that light, it is all pretence,” exclaimed Maude. “Do talk, and tell us what happened at Lady Howard’s *blue* assembly?”

“How did Lady Flora look?” asked Lucy, raising her head.

“The same as usual, Lucy, I suppose,” replied Archer; “you know her dresses more intimately than I do.”

“Uncle Archer does not admire Lady Flora,” said Maude. “I must confess she is just a *petit peu insipide*.”

“Oh! hush, Maude!” whispered Lucy, reproachfully.

“Well, she is very kind to you, I know,

and I like her well enough myself," said Maude; "but there is nothing in her. She is just fit for an old man's wife—fancy twenty-seven years' difference between them—what an awful gulph!"

Archer hastily kicked his foot against a stool, and asked Maude if she would like to play at chess, an uncommon piece of condescension on his part.

Maude was not at all in a mood for anything so sober as chess; but she assented, because she could not politely refuse. She might not have played, perhaps, with so good a grace, had she known her uncle wished to silence her. But Maude was an inveterate talker. While slowly placing her men, she rattled on:

"What a comfort it is, the Countess and Lady Anne are not coming to our ball! They are engaged three deep that night. Dinner with an Earl, tea with a Marquis, and supper with a Duke! Is not that the order of things?"

"How dreadfully silly you are, Maude!" murmured Archer, impatiently.

"But really the Countess is so grand!

and as for Lady Anne, she seems to think it a condescension to live in the same world with poor unfortunates who have no titles !”

“Come, Maude, do not make fun of every one,” said her uncle.

“It is truth,” replied Maude, “and you do not know what hard work poor Lady Flora had to get off these same mighty folks in favour of us ; but her brother came to the rescue, just as her lady-mother was going to administer a little wholesome reproof. If I were Lady Flora, I should be tempted to rebel sometimes, for I never could stand being lectured.”

“I would not be your mother for something, Maude !” said her Aunt smiling.

“Oh ! no one is better than I, when I have my own way !”

“I suppose that is the case with us all,” said Archer ; “come, Maude, when are you going to cease this gossip and begin ?”

“At once, Uncle ; now play your best against a powerful adversary.”

“Saucy child !” exclaimed Augusta, who put down her work and devoted herself to watching the game.

“What did Robert say in the letter you received this morning?” the Squire asked Lucy.

“It was principally about the church, papa. Robert says, they are getting on capitally with the new chancel, and will begin the Castle pew next week.”

“Where is the service done now, not in the church with all that mess?” asked the Squire.

“No; Robert reads prayers in Farmer Perkins’ great kitchen. He has lent it to Robert on Sunday, till the church is finished.”

“Any more news, Lucy-bird?”

“Only that Robert expects Mr. Mostyn to stay a few days with him.”

“I am sorry for that,” exclaimed the Squire. “Mostyn is a dangerous fellow!”

“Lady Anne is desperately in love with him. I am so anxious to see the dear creature!” exclaimed Maude.

“Mind your game, Missey,” said the Squire.

“Robert has written to Mr. Erresford,” continued Lucy, “to ask if he may not have

the pews stained the colour of oak, and varnished: they have been so much damaged that they must be repainted; and the churchwardens agree with Robert that a dark colour will be more durable than white paint."

"Go it!" exclaimed the Squire. "Why we shall not know the old church again, when we return."

"Oh yes! I hope so, papa," said Lucy gently.

"Did I not tell you that everything would be turned upside down when Lady De Walden came?" observed Maude. "Oh Uncle Archer, what a lovely check!"

"Well never mind," said the good-natured Squire, "if every one else changes, that is no reason we should."

"Constant ever! papa is going to take that as his motto!" exclaimed Maude.

"And a very good one, is it not?" asked the Squire.

"I heard Lord Glendowan making a tirade on constancy the other day," continued Maude. "Lady Flora looked so bored, and she said, it was impossible to

remain constant always—circumstances often change us !”

Archer’s lips wore a smile of complacency. He would have talked to himself, had he been alone ; but as it was, he lost his queen, and Maude clapped her hands in triumph.

“ Oh, Archer ! how intensely careless ! So unlike you !” Augusta exclaimed.

“ It is my good play,” Maude said laughingly, “ it is such fun to see Lord Glendowan play with Lady Flora, he will tell her everything beforehand, so there is no game.”

“ Your head seems occupied with Lord Glendowan,” said her Aunt.

“ He is a good old soul ; but I am glad he does not belong to me. He is so good-tempered and easy, one could not even have the satisfaction of quarrelling with him. Fancy, he does not want Lady Flora to be married in a veil.”

“ My dear Maude, why not ?” asked Augusta.

“ A whim, Auntie, I suppose ; but, of course, Lady Flora will not gratify him. I should think old men very tiresome.”



“Should you?” exclaimed the Squire.

Maude laughed. “Oh! you are not old, papa, so you need not pretend to be!”

“How do you know, Missey,” said her father, “whether I am old or not?”

“Because you told me yourself, you were fourteen years older than Uncle Archer, so that does not make you very venerable.”

“And pray who enlightened you about your Uncle’s age?” asked the Squire.

“Uncle Archer did himself. He is rather proud of it, I think,” said Maude, impertinently. “Thirty is such a nice age, as Lady Flora said the other day, when her friend, Miss Capel, married Sir Henry Melville. Check-mate, *mon cher oncle!* What a clever creature I am!” Maude jumped up and made a pirouette round the room.

Archer smiled. “I will have my revenge another night when you are less disposed for chattering. Augusta, I am going to the club for an hour.”

“Very well, Archer,” replied his sister.

“And my love to enquiring friends,” laughed Maude.

“I have a great mind to take you at your word, Maude,” Archer said; then he closed the door, and went out into the starry night. The sky was clear overhead; but he did not look up at it. He only looked down into his own heart, and listened to his own thoughts. What were they saying? Something about success mingled with Lady Flora’s words about thirty being a nice age, and circumstances compelling us to change! Then Archer’s thoughts said, it looked well; and again they murmured about chances of success, though they did not tell what success. I suppose that was a secret.

The morning following, Archer went alone to see the Royal Academy. It had been open a fortnight; and he had not yet visited it. So, catalogue in hand, he wandered through the rooms; and catalogue in hand, Lady Flora wandered through the rooms, Lord Glendowan by her side. She looked sadly ill. Archer was sorry, very sorry, though it was himself who was the cause. Still his sorrow did not prevent him accosting her. Lady Flora thought the fates decreed their meeting. She made a

few hurried remarks about the paintings, but did not offer her hand : it was linked fast to Lord Glendowan's arm. Archer observed this, and quickly passed on. They did not meet again till Maude's ball—the evening of the twenty-third.

What an evening that was for the young sisters ! How proud the Squire looked of his lovely daughters ! How Maude laughed, talked, and all but flirted ; and how Augusta flirted quite—and how painfully shy Lucy felt among such a crowd of strangers, without one feeling in common from their hearts to hers — that heart so exquisitely good, so exquisitely simple, it seemed to soar quite above this world ! How clever, yet how passionless looked Archer ! How cold, how passionless the Lady Flora, as late in the evening, arrayed in lovely white, Cecil led her up to the splendid hostess, dazzling in jewels like a queen. Could Cecil resist Augusta then ? Yes, easily ; and his eyes wandered to seek Lucy. It was refreshment to turn away from the gay, the vain, the frivolous, and talk awhile with the “small, pale child in white,” as Augusta's friend, Mrs.

Phipps, called Lucy. Who asked the Lady Flora to dance, and led her away triumphantly? Yes, it was Archer—what of that? Cecil could give her over safely to him; he saw no harm in it! He saw more in the foolish way Mrs. Phipps' brother, the Count, was conversing with Maude. He imagined Lucy did not quite like it either: but, of course, she made no remark. But the fellow can mean nothing, Cecil thought. He is penniless himself, and would never marry a girl without a fortune. She is a beautiful, noble creature, that Maude! and so inexpressibly dear to that angel, her sister! Lucy's eyes were on Maude. Cecil followed the same direction, and rested on her open, handsome face; then a sudden feeling came within his heart, that prompted him to go forward and stand by her side. Did he want to protect her from the deceit and hollowness of the world? Maude did not observe him. The Count was just telling her she was the belle of the evening.

“Is that your highest compliment?” Maude said in a half-laughing tone.

The Count assured her he was serious. “Mademoiselle is charming!”

“Now,” exclaimed Maude, “that is too bad!” and she drew up her lip and pretended to wear an offended look, though Cecil, who knew her well, noticed a mischievous sparkle in her eyes.

“But Mademoiselle is charming—I would proclaim it in the presence of hundreds,” persisted the Count.

“Monsieur le Comte, you are not skilled in varying compliments,” Maude said with a suppressed smile; “you told my aunt only a few nights ago, that she was the most charming of women. My memory is wonderful, you are going to say. I know it, so that will fail to be a compliment!” Maude looked round and seeing Cecil, she laughed in a girlish, mischievous manner, as if she thought her teasing successful. “Where is Lucy—what have you done with her?” she said, “I hope the poor little thing is enjoying herself.”

“Shall I take you to her?” Cecil asked.

“Oh, do!” Maude replied, and appropriated his arm almost before he had offered it. “Adieu, Monsieur,” she said, smiling over her shoulder at the Count; “adieu! Look up

your compliments ; vary them, change them, before we meet again !”

Cecil could not help laughing at her impertinence, though he felt slightly angry with her. What Cecil had always admired in Mr. Neville’s daughters, was their simplicity or freedom from worldliness ; and he felt jealous over Maude, lest she should lose it. Did he care then for Maude ? Yes ! because she was Lucy’s sister ; and because Lucy cared for her so very, very much ! How brightly the gentle Lucy’s eyes sparkled, and how sweet the tones of her soft, little voice, when Cecil brought Maude to her ! There was just the least perceptible shade of regret on Cecil’s countenance as he looked at Lucy : he envied Robert, but still he did not try to supplant him. No, not by one word or look, and yet Robert and Lucy were not engaged ; no, but Cecil’s mind was honourable to a scruple. It would have been better if there had been more Cecils in Augusta’s drawing-room, in those handsome rooms so full of brilliant light, where fairy forms flit to and fro, where music sounds, and mirthful tones fall on the ear. Music and voices fall heavily on Lucy’s ear ; she

thought she was discontented, but the delights of Forsted, and not of Maude's ball, filled her mind. It was just twelve, the moon would be shining now over the old church tower, and the thatched roof parsonage; all the lights would be out in the village, even at the "Barley-Mow," where the landlord kept such late hours; and the flowers would all have closed their sweet heads, and the glow-worm might be shining on the lawn at the Manor; and the puppies might be barking at the shadows, the long white shadows, which she and Robert loved to look at—dear Robert! Lucy did so wish he was there. Some one came and asked her to waltz, then looked disappointed, because it made her giddy; and she was obliged to refuse, though she did it so kindly, that it was more like conferring a favour than denying one. Dancing fatigued Lucy too much to give her great pleasure, so she sat down in a corner, and looked at the others, her aunt waltzing with no end of a guardsman, and Maude with Cecil. Lucy was amused and smiled on Maude and Cecil, as they whirled round. Then suddenly something made her think of

Lady Flora. Lucy rose and went to find her. Where could she be? Lucy had not seen her since she came in. Had she not? Ten minutes ago, she was dancing a quadrille with Archer. Could Archer have said anything that made Flora suddenly turn pale, and give the wrong hand in the *chaine Anglaise*? There are many things more improbable. When the quadrille was over, Archer promenaded Flora round one room into another, round that into the next, through the refreshment room—down five steps into the conservatory on the landing. What did he do that for? The most likely reason is, that he wished to speak with her alone. Let us hear what he says. No, what Lady Flora says, for she is speaking. It is a strange thing the Lady Flora tells him. He is persecuting her!

And in reply, Archer says, “Persecuting you! oh, Lady Flora, am I so repulsive, that when I speak of love, you call it persecution?”

“But I tell you once more, I may not hear it,” Flora replies, and she clasps her hands and wishes in her heart, that Lord Glen-



dowan were by her side, instead of escorting his selfish sister to Paris; and yet if Lord Glendowan were there, would she love him? No! then why should he be there?

Archer speaks again. "Dear Lady Flora, why may you not listen? There is, there can be no obstacle. You do not love Lord Glendowan. Oh! Lady Flora, you know it; why deceive yourself and him any longer?" Archer's love makes him very desperate. Lady Flora feels this, but she has not strength of mind to go; she only says, "Mr. Neville, you cannot, you do not know my feelings towards him."

"Not know your feelings! when I have watched you day by day, and read in look and action, that you care not for him, nay, that he is even repugnant to you."

"No, no, not repugnant," Flora faintly whispers.

"Is there no hope for me, dearest Flora? Must I drag on a wretched existence, and die of grief and misery?—Yes, death would be hailed and welcomed, I would grasp it to my heart, the day that made you his!"

"Oh, Mr. Neville, cease! this is agony!"

Oh, why did you bring me here—why did I come?—Take me back again, I cannot stay!”

“A moment longer, just one moment—tell me, Lady Flora, is it fear that governs you? Is your mother’s anger so fearful—you dare not brave it?”

“It is fearful!” Lady Flora trembles.

“And is her heart so set on Lord Glendowan? Oh, answer me this! only this!”

“It is! now take me back. If you care for me, take me back!”

Did Archer snatch her hand to his lips, and did the tears gather in her deep, hazel eyes?—It scarce seems so, for the clock strikes one, and Archer stands against a pedestal, his arms crossed, his eyes cold and calm; oh! so calm. And Lady Flora sits by Lucy with scarce a shade of colour on her cheek, and refuses to dance again that night. She tells Lucy she is weary—Lucy is weary too, but her mind is calm as a summer-lake, while Lady Flora’s tosses to and fro like a troubled sea, and no rest comes to it!—

## CHAPTER VI.

Oh, recall the time  
When we were children ! how we played together ;  
How we grew up together ; how we plighted  
Our hearts unto each other, even in childhood !  
Fulfil thy promise, for the hour is come.

SPANISH STUDENT.

THE moon did not shine over St. Walburga and its parsonage ; but the sun shone brightly. It was six o'clock on a lovely morning early in June ; dew-drops bespangled the grass ; the air was redolent with the exquisite perfume of new-mown hay, and the sound of the mowers sharpening their scythes, mingled with the milkmaids' blithe song, and the crowing of the cock in Farmer Perkins' yard. In the lane, outside the parsonage, a labouring man was

standing, looking up the road. Presently, he discerned a cloud of dust. Then down the hill came the royal mail, with three horses; and the leader was troublesome: the coachman had some difficulty to keep him still while the coach halted hard by the gate of the parsonage. And out of the parsonage gate issued the parson, who clambered up the coach, the labouring man handing up a neat black portmanteau after him. Then on went the mail again, with its leader plunging and curvetting, and giving himself a great many airs all the way to Arminster. Then did the parson leave his elevated post most willingly; for the sun was by this time staring him full in the face; and he was pleased with the exchange to a first-class carriage in the long train bound for London.

London—the sooner he arrived there the better, and the sooner he saw Lucy the better! He had been parted from her three months, and he could bear the separation no longer. Lucy was seventeen now. Robert wondered if the Squire would consider that so very young—too young to be married! Robert thought if he wanted to know, he must

ask. Then, if the Squire consented! There could be no question about Lucy: she had been his "little wife" in play so long, that to be his "little wife" in earnest would be the easiest transition possible.

Happy Robert! before four o'clock that afternoon he was sitting in the front drawing-room at Aunt Augusta's, and his "little wife" sat by his side. Not a word yet on the all-important subject, of course; no, that must not be rushed at in a hurry, but be entered into coolly and with consideration. Robert intended to have a quiet interview, first with the Squire, and then impart his success to Lucy. Robert had laid out his plans, and resolved to adhere to them, no doubt; but he did not, after all; and this was the reason. When he arrived at the house in May-Fair, every one was out but Lucy. The Squire had gone to a hunt in Epping Forest. Miss Neville and Maude were showing themselves in the Park. Lucy had remained at home to keep an appointment with Lady Flora, who, just when Lucy was expecting her, sent word to say she was prevented coming; and so it happened that Lucy was alone. And

this being the case, when she had refreshed Robert with luncheon, they both thought, like country folks as they were, how nice it would be to take a walk together; it would seem like old times! Lucy knew the way to Kensington Gardens; and Lucy agreed to take Robert there. Lucy's little mantle and white bonnet were soon put on; and then, her hand on Robert's arm, together they threaded the streets as happy as princes. No, far happier! they were as bright and as happy as children—pure, uncontaminated children. Seventeen years in the world had shown Lucy none of its wickedness; and twenty-eight years had taught Robert very little; and what he saw, he speedily forgot. So they were very pleasant to look on, those two young companions—he with mild blue eyes, waving brown hair, and refined, quiet face; and she with all her goodness hanging about and around her. An old military man crossing one of the squares, and leaning heavily on his stick, for his race was nearly run, stood still and watched them out of sight, and smiled. They gave him a moment's great pleasure, for they reminded him of his youth, when a fair young girl had

leant on his arm. A respectable looking woman with a bundle also looked after them, and murmured, "God bless them both!" A poor, squalid child, offering flowers for sale, withered and faded by the heat, held his basket up to Lucy, and said :

"Oh, Miss, you won't say no!"

Lucy's purse was produced in a moment, and she dropped a bright shilling into his basket, and her gentle, soothing voice told him to keep his flowers, "poor little fellow!" That miserable child lived in a wretched court Lucy never dreamt of, when she rolled along in her aunt's carriage; and she never dreamt either, that the poor flower-boy, who had been taught to pray by a good city missionary, prayed for her that night 'as "that angel lady."

On went Robert and his fair charge, keeping the shady side of streets, and hurrying over crowded crossings. Lucy holding very tight the protecting arm, and after looking fearfully at the carriages, asked Robert when they were over, if she had not become very brave! On went open carriages full of light parasols and smart

bonnets. On went close carriages, carts, omnibuses, gentlemen on horseback, ladies on horseback, making for Rotten Row; and on went the country parson and the young girl, pleased with each other, with their walk, and the shady trees before them in Kensington Gardens. Being neither loose dogs nor footmen, they were suffered to pass in by the lodge; and then going on the grass, they wandered on till they found a quiet seat beneath a great elm, and there they sat down and held a long, long talk, beginning in nothing and ending in something—something which made them both happier, happiest of all the gay throng within sight and sound, wheeling in crowds around the Park. Robert and Lucy first talked of Forsted; of their early days, when Lucy used to listen to Robert's stories, while she sat on the grass and made daisy-chains to hang around her neck. They both agreed those were very happy days, and Robert did not see why the present should not be as happy; there was only one thing wanting to him, and when Lucy asked what that was, Robert frankly told her, he wanted a companion in



his solitary parsonage, he could bear to live alone no longer. A bright colour suddenly rushed to Lucy's face, and suffused her cheeks with crimson. She hastily shut her parasol, then opened it again, and felt angry with herself. Then she looked at her little watch, Lady Flora's birthday-gift, and told Robert it was six o'clock. Robert said the time had passed very quickly, he thought it was only five ; then he looked around, they were alone—no one within hearing—alone with the summer sighing of the wind, and the buzz of the bee as he whirled past.

“Lucy, little wife !” Robert murmured in a low endearing tone. Lucy looked up, but she did not speak, and Robert went on. “When you were a child, Lucy, this was only a term of endearment. May I dare to hope that one day, I may have a right to call you so?—oh, dearest Lucy ! I have no parents, no one but a sister far away. If you refuse to hear me, I shall be very desolate, for I love no one in the world, as I love you !”

Lucy's little hand was gently placed in Robert's, and her soft voice told him he must not be desolate.

“There is no desolation near you, sweet one!” he said while a joyous light sparkled in his eyes. “Life will be one perpetual sunlight—when I know we can never be parted again!”

“But, dear Robert, there is home—papa and Maude, think of them;” she said in a gentle tone. “I belong to them, Robert; will they part with me?”

“There will be no parting, sweet Lucy!” he replied, “your father and Maude will be always near.”

Lucy sighed, though she smiled as she said, “Oh, Robert, this is all so new, so unexpected! What will papa say? he will not understand it.”

“Your father has been young once, and he loved his Lucy as I love mine. He will understand it all.”

Lucy looked trustingly at Robert, while she said, “Dear, dear papa, he is so good, so kind!”

“He will deny nothing which is for our happiness, sweetest,” Robert murmured, “and you can trust me, my Lucy, that I will love you, and take care of you now, as I did

when you were the tiny child I loved as the heart's delight of my boyish days."

And Lucy replied in a low voice, "Yes, Robert, I can always trust you." So that fair child gave away her love in simple confidence to her early play-fellow, and confided in him as implicitly as she would in a parent; and it was an hour of intense happiness, when amid the bustle and turmoil of the surrounding world, Robert led the fair girl—dear to him always, but dearer now than she had ever been before, back to her London home.

The Squire had hunted successfully, and returned home late in the evening, pleased with all around; with Robert for coming to see him; with Maude for her handsome looks and saucy words; and with his Lucy because she was his heart's delight, and he was never better pleased, than when she was near him. She could not have been nearer then, for she sat close by the Squire's chair, with her hand nestled in his, quieter than even her usual quietude, listening to the history of his day's sport. It was a very warm

night ; the windows were all left open, though the blinds were down. Presently a German band began to play in the street below. The Squire got up and threw down some money—Lucy followed him to the window : she had had a secret on her mind for some hours, she could bear it no longer ; and she said in a low voice,

“ Papa ! I have something to tell you—Will you come with me ? ”

Her father turned round to her, and asked, “ What is it, little woman ? ”

She took the Squire’s hand in hers, and led him away into the conservatory. There was a green seat in it. She made her father sit there, while she placed herself by his side, her arm over his shoulder, her head on his bosom, her gentle face looking up at him. There was no fear in Lucy for her father—there were flowers all around and above them, those flowers had seemed to reproach Flora, but to Lucy they spoke of beauty and purity in her thoughts.

The Squire stroked her soft, fair hair, and asked again, “ What is it my little woman has

to tell me? Something about Lady Flora's wedding. You are invited, is that it, my child?"

"Oh no papa, it is not about Lady Flora."

"What then, my rosebud?"

"Papa, Robert and I took a long walk this afternoon, and Robert said a great deal more than he has ever said before. We have known each other so long; and, dear papa, he wants you to spare me for him. Robert intended to say this to you, but I thought no one ought to tell you but myself."

"My own sweet bird, what is it I hear?" the Squire exclaimed; "some one wants my Lucy, my best treasure. Oh! how can I spare her!" and the Squire clasped in his arms his darling and treasured one.

Lucy gently returned her father's fond caress. "It all rests with you, dear papa," she said, "Robert and I agreed that it did. We wish you to feel quite happy about it, as well as Maude."

"And what does Maude say, my own little woman?" asked the Squire, looking at her

as if his whole heart was wrapped up in his child.

“Papa, I have told Maude nothing. It was difficult not to do so, but we agreed that you ought to be asked first, even before darling Maude knew.”

“And does my precious bird love Robert so very much? Could she be happy, very happy with him?”

Lucy replied in a clear voice, “yes, dear papa, and Robert says I have always been his little wife, and asks if you cannot spare me for him now. There will be Maude still with you; and then, papa, I shall see you every day, and I shall love you just the same?”

“My child, my darling!” the Squire meant to say more; but Phil Neville who laughed away every care, actually shed tears, when asked to part with his Lucy! that gentle thing who put her arms about his neck and wiped away the tears on his sunburnt cheek, and whispered softly:

“Dear, dear papa! you must not, indeed, do so. I will never go if it makes you un-

happy; you know how very much I love you, do I not, papa?"

"And don't I love you, darling, so much, that what I live for is to see you happy. There now, little woman," and the Squire kissed her again and again, and brushed away his tears, "there now, little woman, I will make you a present to him, such a present! and I will come and take tea every day at the parsonage, and look at my own sweet birdie; and she must not forget her old father, who wishes her a long and happy life with Robert!"

Lucy rested peacefully in her father's arms. It had been an exciting day, and the quiet child felt agitated; but she would not allow herself to cry, she only said:

"Dear papa, you must let me tell Maude myself. Suppose you were to send her to me. I do not think I shall come back into the drawing-room any more to-night—you can say everything for me, papa, to the rest."

Her father seemed as though he could not tear himself from her; but he did at last, and sent Maude to her sister; and in

their own room they both cried in each other's arms, and Maude murmured sobbing :

“ Oh ! darling, how can I live without you. You will take all the sunshine away when you go ! ”

And Lucy recovering her wonted calmness, kissed her sister's cheek and said :

“ But, Maude, dear sister, I am not gone yet. I shall wait till you get accustomed to the thought of parting, and not till then must Robert fetch me. ”

Lucy's thoughts were ever unselfish, even now, when she rested her weary head on her pillow, and reflected on the past day, she was more occupied with plans to reconcile her father and Maude to parting with her, than plans for herself. She only prayed ere she slept, that wherever she was, God's will might be done with her.

And while Lucy tasted the calm, untroubled sleep of peace, Lady Flora sat before a table, her hands stretched out on it, and her face resting there, her conscience loudly calling on her to resist temptation, and her will bidding her rush into it. She



was in her own room, the door locked, and before her lay a crushed and tumbled note, with these few words traced on it :

“ Lady Flora,

“ I ask but one more meeting—and then, should you desire it, no word of love shall ever pass my lips again—grant me this one interview I beseech you. To-morrow at twelve, in the picture gallery of the Pantheon. ’Tis the last boon I ask!—oh! deny it not to

“ Your wretched imploring

“ ARCHER.”

Flora, pale and miserable, asked herself again and again, why she ever cared for him, why did he care for her? Why! oh why! had they ever met? Oh! that she were free! oh, that her mother only loved her!

Archer was clever, of ancient family, moved in the highest circles, was universally well spoken of.

“ Oh, Archer! why must I shun thee, when I love thee so much, so dearly, so entirely, that even—oh, dreadful thought!—when I

am Lord Glendowan's bride—my heart will dwell with thee !”

Flora's whole frame shook with agony ; and her conscience went on loudly bidding her resist temptation throughout that long, sleepless night, that dreadful night ! No effort could bring calmness or composure ; sometimes she resolved to grant Archer the meeting ; then again she dared not trust herself to see him ; then she longed to unburden her heart's troubles and seek counsel and advice—from whom—the answer was a blank, a dreary void. A mother who did not love her, a sister with a heart devoid of sympathy ! There was one who would have listened to her tale kindly, and with no word of reproach, who would have advised for her happiness and helped her through her perplexities ; but Flora shunned him. She would not make Cecil the sharer of her troubles ; she would bear them alone, and meet Archer just this once, and then, farewell to life's joys and happiness !

Punctual to his time, Archer paced the picture gallery of the Pantheon in the full confidence of success—the success of a

strong mind over a wavering one. He had studied Lady Flora's character—its changeful nature, its weakness. A few stray arguments, a little desperation in his love, and he should conquer, if not yet, ere long. The clock was striking twelve. With slow and faltering step, Flora ascended the stairs plainly dressed, and a thick lace veil almost concealing her pallid face. She glanced around the room, as she entered ; and, among a few straggling visitors, Archer stood, his eyes on the entrance. In one moment he was with her, seated by her side in that forlorn-looking room.

“Lady Flora, this is kind,” he said. “I feared lest I had been too presumptuous in asking this meeting.”

“Our last !” Flora murmured.

“Our last ? Oh ! Lady Flora, can it be that I must cease to look on you—cease to listen to those tones that send joy to my heart. Beloved Lady Flora, you cannot be so cruel !”

“Upbraid me not, Mr. Neville,” she murmured. “My fate is hard ; but I must submit to it, even though it crush me, and

break my heart. But, oh! upbraid me not; for I can bear anything but that."

"Does the Lady Flora, then, care for my reproaches? Can it be," he asked in an impassioned tone, "that her heart responded to the love in mine?"

"Oh! Mr. Neville, what have I said!" she exclaimed, in a tone of bitter wretchedness. "I granted this meeting not for words like these, but that you may—"

"That I may adore you more and more each time we meet," he replied. "Lady Flora, think once more ere you take those vows from which nought but death can free you. Tell me, I pray you, is he dear to you as husband should be? Can you be happy? If so, though there is an end of all worth living for on earth, yet I feel I can patiently abide my doom."

"Oh! what shall I do?" Flora murmured, while she scarce breathed. "Generous, noble Archer, must I cast you off?" her thoughts said. She could not speak; and Archer continued:

"You cannot answer me. Oh! Lady Flora,

best and dearest ! I cannot give you up to misery and wretchedness. Fly with me, and be all my own. I would gladly renounce home, fame—everything. Your relations love you not. Then why should their will influence you ?”

Hastily Flora rose, then sank tremblingly back again. Her voice was scarcely audible as she said :

“ Mr. Neville, I came not to hear such words. We must part ; you must forget me—forget that the miserable Flora ever crossed your path, and clouded for one moment your happiness. Go on ; reach fame, honour, renown—forsake them not ; and when, in my lonely home, I hear your praise, perchance a smile may light up my clouded brow. Farewell, Archer, farewell for ever !”

She rose, extended her hand ; and while he stood lost in amazement, she passed away swiftly down the stairs, and, sinking back in her carriage, was quickly driven home.

The day passed, another and yet a third, and no tidings fell on Archer’s ear of the Lady Flora. It is much to be questioned if he had any conscience, for he felt none of its

upbraidings, but there was an anxiety in his mind; for though his love was selfish, yet it was intense; and he was impatient at her absence, and hated the numberless engagements which prevented his sister and nieces from calling at Park Lane.

It was Saturday evening, and at the hour of dinner. The Countess's empty carriage stopped before Archer's door, a note was given in, and the coachman waited—for whom?—for Lucy! The note was addressed to her, it said: Lady Flora was ill and longed for her—it was no question to Lucy that Robert was there—she hastily checked any thought of annoyance that might have crossed her gentle spirit; and as Robert was handing her into the carriage, she said softly, “You must help me, dear Robert, to pray for poor Lady Flora!” Little Lucy was so sorry, so very sorry for her friend, and still more so when she entered her darkened room and saw her lying exhausted on her pillows. The Countess, looking even more haughty than usual, sat by Flora's bed-side, a book in her hand. She was not reading, but communing with her proud, worldly thoughts, while the

tears rolled down Flora's fevered cheeks, and her clasped hands moved in agony to and fro on the coverlid. When softly and scarce audibly, Lucy was ushered in by Lady Flora's maid, the Countess rose, stooped and kissed her cheek. "It is very kind of you to come, Lucy," she said, "can you remain the rest of the evening?"

"Oh yes! and the next day too, if she could be of any use, and poor dear Lady Flora, was she so very ill?" The Countess pushed aside the curtain, and Lucy was clasped in Flora's arms. The Countess stood a moment, then sighed and left the room. Why did not Flora love her as she did Lucy? The Countess should have remained in that sick room, and she might have learned a lesson from Lucy how to love and gain love. What! the Countess De Walden learn of little Lucy Neville? No, never!

Scarcely had the door closed on the Countess, when Flora burst forth in bitter tones. "Lucy, my angel child, why did you come to me? 'tis but to hear of misery, such as you never heard before! Lucy," and Flora

looked almost wildly around. "Lucy, it is done. I have cast him off; and I have no one now in the wide world to love me—but you!"

Lucy was terrified. Was Flora delirious? she tried to soothe her. "Dearest Lady Flora," she began, but hastily Flora checked her.

"Forget my rank, Lucy; if you love me call me Flora; my rank is only a barrier between me and happiness! Oh! I wish I were a governess or a needlewoman—anything but what I am!"

"Dear Flora, you must not say so; you are so agitated, try and compose yourself, and you will get better."

"I shall never be better, as long as I live. I shall always be what I now am, broken-down and wretched: it is mental suffering not bodily, that has brought me here."

"Dearest Flora, it will pass away. The sun is ever shining, only we cannot always see it, because of these clouds; so there is ever more happiness in store for us, even behind great troubles; oh! I am sure there is!"



“Not for me, Lucy ; there is no sunshine for me : my mother will keep that away. Oh, Lucy, I do think she hates me !”

“You must not think so, darling Flora ; some people are not affectionate even towards those they love.”

“Lucy, you did not see her, you who have such a father, such a sister ! How can you know what such natures as my mother’s are ? — Oh, Lucy ! it was on Wednesday afternoon, I wrote to him a long, long letter, humble and penitent enough. I studied every word and cried over it too, how bitterly !— Then I took it to her, and gave it into her hands ; told her I had never loved Lord Glendowan, could never love him, would never deceive him by giving him such a heart as mine—and then—oh, Lucy ! how her eyes flashed, and how white her lips, as she tore it in a thousand pieces before my eyes ! — Lord Glendowan is in Rome. His sister took him thither. In three weeks he returns, but I will not be his wife, no, though I refuse him at the altar !”

“That can never happen, dear Flora,”

replied Lucy, scarce knowing what she said, so startled was she at what she had heard.

“No, no, it shall not be. I cannot meet him, Lucy. Will you take me home with you to the quiet country; this London, it kills me!”

“You have been so wearied, poor dear,” said Lucy soothingly. She scarcely knew what to do, she wondered if Lady Flora were in earnest, or if her mind wandered.

“Harassed and wearied,” murmured Flora, “and there is no rest for me!—Lucy, those words seem to haunt me—‘Seekest thou rest, O mortal? Seek it no more on earth. For destiny will not cease from dragging thee through the rough wilderness of life.’ Lucy, when we read them together, what did you tell me? I forget.”

“I told you,” Lucy said in a gentle voice, “that those words were not true. There is rest every where for those who love God, even if it is stormy on earth; and in heaven,

there is everlasting rest, when earth's life is ended."

"But, Lucy, I am not fit to die, not half good enough. If I were only like you, I should long for death?"

"You would not, darling Flora; unless it were God's will, you ought to be glad to live upon earth to do what He pleases."

"I do anything good!—Oh Lucy! you do not know me. I could not tell you half the bad things in my heart; they would terrify you."

"Do not think about them, dear Flora; shall I read to you?"

"No, no, talk to me. You are better than ten thousand books."

"But, dear Flora, the Bible," whispered Lucy.

Flora closed her eyes, and seemed inclined to sleep. Lucy looked around the room, and her sweet face grew grave: there was no Bible there—no printed Bible; but in Lucy's own heart were laid up stores of holy learning, and as she bent over Flora's pillow, she repeated to the child of rank, as she had to many a child of poverty, a Psalm of beauty

and comfort. Tears flowed from beneath Flora's closed eyelids : they were not tears of passion, for after the storm came a calm, and Lucy's young voice soothed that troubled spirit to rest.

## CHAPTER VII.

O! werden wir auch jemals glücklich werden!  
Sind wir's denn nicht? Bist du nicht mein? Bin ich  
nicht dein?

PICCOLOMINI, SCHILLER.

It was the eleventh of July, the day fixed for Flora's wedding; but no bridal arrangements were to be seen in Park Lane. The house looked dull and gloomy in a fast-falling shower. A brougham stood at the door with two chesnut horses; and the servants wore their overcoats. There was nothing bridal about their appearance. Presently Lady Flora stepped into the carriage under the shelter of an umbrella, wearing a coloured muslin dress and black mantle, and a blue

veil over her simple straw bonnet, which was anything but bride-like. So her wedding could not be coming off that day.

Lady Flora had been very ill for some days ; but, with such a gentle, loving nurse as Lucy, she quickly rallied ; and Lucy's quiet example and sweet words greatly calmed her, and for the time seemed to have a beneficial influence. But what Lucy effected the Countess had quickly undone. All the feelings of discontent and anger that had ever dwelt in Flora's breast, were called forth, when, on her recovery, still persisting in her resolve of breaking her engagement with Lord Glendowan, she met with reproaches, harsh words and stern looks from both the Countess and Lady Anne.

At length, Flora was driven to desperation. Of her own accord, she appointed an interview with Archer Neville, secret, like the former. This brought forth a second and a third. To-day Lady Flora was going to keep a last lover's meeting. What wonder that she looked fearfully agitated, and bent forward to the carriage window for air, though the weather was rather cool. She had told her

mother she was going to see her old and faithful nurse, the only friend of her early childhood, who lived within a few miles of Epping. Lady Flora took no note of the country, as she passed along field or forest; high-road or lane were all the same to her. She did not even notice the rain cease, and a break in the heavy, dark clouds, till a sun-beam burst sparkling upon her; but it met no bright response in the Lady Flora's heart. She drew down the blind, and shut it out. The drive was long; they had many miles of road to travel. Flora did not like being alone with her own thoughts; for they troubled and harassed her. She thought the horses slow, and the way interminable. But the end came at last; and she alighted before a respectable farm-house; then told the servants to put up for a couple of hours, and entering the gateway, passed out of their sight.

The farm-house was approached by a long walk between closely-cut hedges. She did not move towards it, but remained standing near the entrance, not in an irresolute, but a premeditated manner, as if she had some purpose in view in waiting there. Then,

when the sound of the carriage-wheels had died away, she turned back and went out again into the high road. Quickly she walked along, leaving the farm, with all its barns and out-houses behind her, passing by meadows of green grass and fields of waving corn, neither listening to the song of the bird, nor the buzz of the brilliant dragon-flies that flew past her. The fragrant wild-flowers under the hedge-rows, the gay butterflies were to her as though they existed not. Twice she leant for a moment, on a stile for rest; once she asked the way of a jolly plough-boy whistling over his day's work. Perhaps the Lady Flora envied him? Presently a village came in sight—a little rural, English village, with thatched cottages, and stocks on the green, and a venerable church, its ancient graves o'ershadowed by roses. Flora's heart beat quicker as she entered the quiet hamlet; and she asked a cottager standing by her wicket-gate, if she would give her a little water.

The woman brought her some in a gilded mug from a cool spring close by; and when Flora had drunk some, she bathed her forehead and seemed to feel refreshed. The



cottager said she looked weary, and invited her to come in; but Flora declined, and opening her purse, offered her money. This, however, was refused, and Flora went on towards the churchyard. The gate was locked; there was a stile by its side, and Flora climbed over and sat down on a moss-covered stone. There were some children coming through, on their way from school, their hands full of wild-flowers. One tiny creature stopped just before the forlorn figure on the tomb-stone, and with a compassionate look gave Flora her nosegay, honeysuckle and wild roses tied up with grass. Flora took it almost mechanically, and held it in her hand, though she scarcely knew she had it there. Presently she took out her watch, and began to grow impatient, when a tottering infirm old man came along the flagged walk with a bunch of heavy keys, and entered the vestry door. Flora watched him in. Why did she look after him so earnestly? Was there to be a christening or funeral, or did she expect to see a "Spectre Wedding" in this crumbling old church, that she looked so ashy pale? Another footstep fell on her ear; she turned

round quickly ; an arm was put around her, lips pressed hers, and low soothing words were uttered ; but she did not speak ; and then she was led into that damp, earthly little church, with a cold chill around its walls ; and Lady Flora and Archer stood before a stone-flagged chancel, and behind them the old sexton and a still more venerable pew-opener.

Flora—Flora ! what are you doing there ? You, the daughter of the proud, stately Lady of the noble house of De Walden. You, in common attire, with no ornament save that village child's wild-flowers, which you clasp so nervously, why stand you there—and why does the clergyman in rapid and careless tones read aloud from the prayer-book the marriage service ? Oh ! Flora, what would Lucy Neville say ? would she not call you back ? But it is too late now—"for better for worse, for richer, for poorer," you are his. Why do you tremble and press that plain ring, and feel if it is really there ? and why does your hand shake as you write in your dingy vestry, in that mouldy book, your maiden name, side by side with his ? It is

done now—no bells have rung—no train of noble white-robed bridesmaids follow. No dowagers in stately array ; no Viscount bridegroom ; no train of attendants and line of splendid equipages ; no glistening jewels and brilliant exotics ; no Bishop to pronounce the blessing ; no titled relative to give her away ! A fat, fox-hunting parson, a mumbling clerk, a tottering sexton, and palsied pew-opener—these were the only witnesses of Lady Flora's bridal. Where would the Countess's pride be now !

Again Lady Flora sat on a tomb-stone. Archer was by her side ; her head fell on his shoulder, and she sobbed there. Archer soothed and comforted her—"A few short weeks, beloved," he said, "and then I may claim you, and we will never part again."

"Oh, Archer ! why part now ? My mother's anger will be just as dreadful a month hence as it is to-day."

"When I come to her rich and distinguished, then my Flora, she may not spurn me as she would now."

"Rich and distinguished, dear Archer."

"Yes, my beloved, in a few weeks hence,

I shall gain another step in my profession. I have talents and must distinguish myself. And riches, yes!" he added, in a tone of triumph. "I shall be rich too; a relative has willed me a fortune, and, Flora, his days are numbered—ere long it must be mine."

There was so much of calculation, so much of riches depending on death in his words, that Flora, almost amazed, raised her drooping head and looked up. "Do not talk of rank or riches. Oh, Archer! I hate the very words! I wish I were some poor orphan child, and that I owed my all to you."

"Hush, Flora!" and Archer stooped and kissed her cold pale lips. "I will not have you complain on your wedding-day."

"But I must, Archer! Archer, the separation is not half so bad for you as for me."

"Do you not then think I shall long after you, beloved one?" he said reproachfully.

"Yes, Archer, yes; but then your home! there is nothing to make you miserable there. No taunting words—no bitter sarcasms: every hour of the day I hear what a bad heart I have—how I have deceived Lord

Glendowan—how unfeminine my conduct has been. If I were to sit here till night, I could not tell you what I have suffered !”

“ Bear it for a short time longer, sweet wife,” he said ; “ bear it for my sake, because you are mine : no one can tear us apart now.”

“ No, never, never,” murmured Flora ; her head rested heavily on his shoulder, and there was silence complete, except some sparrows quarrelling in a yew-tree, and the sound of the blacksmith’s anvil in the village below.

“ Flora, my beloved !” Archer’s voice broke on the stilly air.

“ You will tell me we must soon separate, oh, Archer ! and to-morrow we leave town. No more hasty meeting—I go to a world of loneliness and misery, and you plunge deeper into a world of business and strivings after fame. Oh ! Archer, what a strange bridal ! I am yours, and yet you say, you still have to win me.”

“ No longer win—but when I have acquired new honours, I come to claim you. Not as a suppliant, but a victor claiming a rightful

reward. Flora, I shall work with double zeal now it is for you."

But Flora was not to be soothed. "Oh, Archer!" she said, "it is dreadful to think, no one has blessed my wedding-day! Why am I so different from Lucy? Smiles and blessings will surround her, while they are denied me: even my proud mother relaxes when Lucy is near!"

"Lucy is a child, a simple, artless creature, and every one naturally caresses her."

"No, no, Archer, they love her for her goodness—because she is so pure, so holy!" exclaimed Flora.

"A canopy of smiles hangs over her now; but who knows whether it will not turn to a veil of weeping. It is not always the happiest bride, Flora beloved, with whom the after life glides smoothest."

"With Lucy it will be ever smooth; all things must be sunny to her; but to me—" Flora stopped with a sudden exclamation of horror—the bell from the old dreary church began to toll; for the first time Flora looked towards the village, and beheld a rustic funeral ascending the slope.

“ Oh, Archer, come away !” Flora exclaimed in a low, hoarse tone, as she caught his arm convulsively. The bell continued its mournful sound as Archer led his trembling bride from the church-yard. Flora was not naturally superstitious, but there was something in that solemn bell, that open grave, and the long train of youthful mourners following a sister to her silent home, that sent a cold chill to Flora’s heart—a funeral on her wedding day ! It seemed ominous of ill. She was silent till they passed the village.

“ Archer,” she then said suddenly, “ may I let Lucy know all—may I beg her to intercede now, this day, with my mother. She must relent ; she must pardon me ; and then to-morrow, we need not part ? Oh, that bell ! it terrifies me. Archer, if we are separated, we may never meet again !”

“ Flora, dearest Flora !” he exclaimed, a little of his natural impatience breaking forth ; “ listen to me calmly. We are married now, and there should be no secrets between us. I told you before, I have a relative rich and old, whose property is made

over to me. But did he know I had married in secret, he would cut it all off from me, every farthing, and then farewell to all my schemes for you! Flora, till he dies, our marriage must be a profound secret from all the world!"

There was a tone of authority in Archer's voice, which, however, Lady Flora heeded not, but throwing herself into Archer's arms, she exclaimed in an outburst of grief:

"He may live for years—for long, long years! and must we be torn asunder for the sake of paltry riches? No, no, Archer, it must not be—my father left me a fortune, no one can take from me, it is all yours. Let us fly to the continent, far, far away from those who care not for us, and live in solitude and love!"

"Solitude and love!" strange words to Archer's ears. Fame and riches were in accordance with his own heart's desires; fame, that he might be exalted above his fellow-men; and riches unlawfully acquired to support fame! and the trusting Flora looked on him as perfect, and thought that all his ambitious plans were for her sake. He was her



idol. She adored him above religion; above holy desires; above heaven itself; and when she bade him adieu with tearless eyes, but with an agonized working in her pale, marble-like face—then it seemed as if the world had gone from her! She was alone, though the birds warbled harmoniously, and the heavens above were so blue, so enchantingly blue, that it appeared as if angels could not be far distant, or that holy city, whose untold glories seemed almost to begin in that mighty canopy bathed in the bright sunshine! But Flora heeded not nature's beauties—she trod the lanes with swift but uneven step; her head bent down, her right hand clasped tightly over the left, her fingers holding fast the ring which she must so soon conceal; aye, and her name and everything appertaining to *him*! He had said so—it must be. He would not fly with her—no, not for all her entreaties. He would toil for her; gain for her; then lay his laurels at her feet and claim her proudly—she should be his queen, and the world would not look down on Flora Neville; but envy her—her lordly mansion—her jewels, her grandeur—and her husband! And then—ah! she should

gaze from her pedestal on those who had spurned and scorned her, and in her turn, she should spurn and scorn them ! She thought over all this as she went up the lane ; but no comfort did her husband's proud, revengeful words bring to her—anguish was on her brow and in her heart ; and that day brought no blessing to her.

Lady Flora was nearly spent with fatigue and excitement when she arrived at White's farm, and not a little relieved was she when told by a servant that her mistress and all the family were gone for a day's excursion to Fairlop. Flora said, she would wait there for her carriage ; and the girl showed her into a parlour, and brought her some refreshment—but her appetite was gone : she cared not for her favourite little round loaves, the delicious golden butter, nor the home-cured ham and preserves. When the maid was gone, she pushed them all from her ; and after drinking a glass of clear spring water, she threw herself on the hard sofa and covered her eyes with her handkerchief to shut out the light—and exhausted and weary, she fell into a heavy doze, which lasted a brief half-hour ; and then

she was roused by the servant announcing the arrival of her carriage. Flora started up with a wild look, which almost terrified the girl; and for the first time Flora bethought herself of her ring. Her gloves were off; had the girl seen it? But no, it was concealed by her mantle. Hastily she bade the maid to tell her servants their mistress was coming—then when the door closed, quickly she drew off the ring, pressed it to her burning lips, and placed it in a large old locket she wore beneath her dress, a boyish gift of the young Earl, who had chosen it on account of its size and some diamonds which glittered on the back. And Flora lay Archer's ring side by side with the brown, wavy lock of hair which she loved, with a fondness only her poor brother had drawn forth, and which no one thought her capable of feeling. Flora reclined wearily in the carriage, with her bonnet in her lap; her throbbing aching head could not bear even its light pressure; and a dreamy state of unconsciousness seemed to come over her: it was not sleep, but a deadening feeling, which appeared almost to crush her.

The Countess returned from a drive just as Lady Flora came in. They met in the hall.

“Flora!” the Countess exclaimed, “what is the matter?”

“Nothing, mamma,” she replied.

“You look so strange and wild,” continued her mother, “what have you been doing?”

“It is my head, mamma,” said Flora in a tone of passive misery.

“I mean your dress child—come and look at yourself: your bonnet is crushed, your veil hangs round your throat, and as to your mantle, it is twisted entirely round.”

“Oh, mamma! I did not know,” Flora murmured, as she followed the Countess mechanically into the library, and dropped down on the first chair by the door. Lady de Walden opened some notes which had arrived in her absence, and Flora sat still, with her dark eyes fixed on her mother with an eager, burning look. She was longing to throw herself at her mother’s feet, and confessing all, implore forgiveness; but her husband’s secret must be kept. There was no comfort for her.

The Countess looked up suddenly, "Flora, I wish you would not stare at me. You make me feel quite uncomfortable."

"I beg your pardon, mamma," and Flora rose.

There was something in Flora's look of utter misery, that touched one of the better chords of the Countess's heart.

"I hope they gave you some refreshments, Flora," she said.

These words would have been nothing to any one else, but to Flora any sympathy from her mother was gladdening, and she replied in a brighter tone: "Yes, mamma, thank you; nurse and all the family were out; but I rested."

"The journey has been too much for you. Dr. Heath particularly forbade fatigue."

"He said the drive might do me good, mamma," Flora replied, as she held by the handle of the door.

"I do not think it has," the Countess answered, turning over the leaves of a book by her side. "Lie down till dinner, and ring for wine; you require a stimulant."

“I would prefer ice, thank you, mamma,” said Flora.

“I will send you some. Now go and remain very quiet, and do not torment yourself with thinking.”

Flora longed to go and kiss her mother, if it were only her hand; but the Countess disliked *demonstrations*; and she did not know if she might venture, so she went away with slow and tottering steps, grasping everything near her for support; blaming herself for her timidity with her mother, and that she had ever thought her harsh. Oh! what would not sympathy have effected with Flora! The Countess never thought of this; she only ejaculated as she watched Flora's receding figure:

“What an endless trouble that poor child is to me!” and then she forgot Flora and everything, in a novel she had brought with her. There was an ‘unfortunate heroine’ in her own family, only she knew it not! but before the Countess began to read, she rang the bell and told a servant to send Stevens to Lady Flora with ice.

In the meanwhile Archer went back to his

chambers, and from thence to May Fair, and acted as though nothing out of the ordinary routine of his life had happened. He escorted his sister to a ball that evening, danced, talked, made himself generally agreeable, and was looked at longingly by many an aspiring mother, and made the subject of conversation by many a young lady to her confidential friend. Numberless were the surmises as to when and whom Mr. Neville would marry—and he, conscious of being watched, courted and flattered, danced on, talked on, with perfect unconcern—for the Lady Flora was his now; and thus one ambitious scheme had succeeded. And yet it seemed strange to make her his wife, only to leave her again to anxiety and sorrow; but Archer knew the part he was playing, and played it well. He could have obtained her acceptance, and preserved the secret engagement until Sir Edgar Tyrrell's death had made him the possessor of the expected property; but he had studied Flora's character, and was aware how timid and yielding she was; and he feared that when away from his

immediate influence, she would yield to the Countess's anger and Lord Glendowan's entreaties, and be induced once more to receive her former lover. Archer knew she cared not for his Lordship ; but what might not her mother's threats effect ? Thus came about the clandestine wedding. Archer had felt no compunction in having been the means of inducing Lady Flora to commit a step, which if discovered would bring down upon her anger and perhaps disgrace. He only looked upon it as a means to gratify his ambition ; not but that he loved her, though his love was selfish and ever subservient to his pride. But with great concern and anxiety, did he regard the intended marriage between his younger niece and Sir Edgar's nephew. He had heard the Baronet express his approbation of such an alliance, and his wish to remember Lucy in his will ; and now he dreaded the tidings reaching Sir Edgar's ear. Nothing but the death of the Baronet would free him from his incessant fears, lest Robert should be reinstated in his uncle's favour.

Lady Tyrrell, he knew, desired this, and



Archer trembled, lest after all his schemes and insinuations against the unoffending Robert, he might yet fail in his darling wish, the hope and dream of his life, that of being nominated the heir to Sir Edgar's name and property!

## CHAPTER VIII.

Oh, how this spring of love resembleth  
The uncertain glory of an April day ;  
Which now shows all the beauty of the sun,  
And by and by a cloud takes all away !

SHAKSPEARE.

BLITHE voices sounded once more in the old Manor House. Maude, her flounces exchanged for a country cotton, was kneeling on the floor of their favourite room, unpacking ; while Lucy took away the things as Maude tossed them out, and carried them to their respective places. The fresh summer breeze came wafted in at the open windows, laden with the sweet perfume of new-mown hay, which was mingled with the fragrance of a vase of roses and jessamine on the table.

A thrush in the tall elm whose shadow rested on the grass was warbling forth a gentle song, while a sparrow hopped fearlessly on the window-ledge, and picked the seeds which Maude's canary scattered about.

"The country is a capital place after all, Lucy!" exclaimed Maude, as she tossed a number of white shoes on the floor. "I feel more independent here than in London. Aunt Augusta is a good creature, but I like being my own mistress. Let me see; what happens to-day?"

"There will not be time to do much," said Lucy, carefully collecting together the scattered articles, as Maude threw them out of the boxes.

"Oh! this unpacking is nothing," replied Maude; "it shall all be finished before dinner. I am wild to mount the new black horse; you must come and see him presently. Such a splendid creature! glorious at a hunt!"

"I wish you had not set your heart on following the hounds, Maude, dear," said Lucy.

"My darling, there is not the slightest

danger ; it would take a great deal to unhorse me."

"I know you ride very well—but Maude," and here Lucy hesitated a little.

"Well, little sis?"

"Only Mr. Erresford did not seem to think ladies were in their proper place at a hunt."

"Over prudent young man! What possible harm does he think would befall me? Of course, I should never go without papa."

"So I told him," said Lucy timidly.

"And he discussed the matter with you!" exclaimed Maude laughing. "He takes an uncommon interest in me."

"I think he does in all of us," observed Lucy, folding up Maude's last ball dress.

"I suppose you will call this afternoon at Castle St. Agnes," said Maude.

"No, Maude. Robert comes for me at three o'clock to go to Friarsford."

"You cannot walk, Lucy?"

"Papa has lent us the dog-cart. Robert

wishes particularly to enquire something about the new poor people who have come to Smith's cottage."

"Oh, by the bye! there is a post office established at Friarsford, at Field's the stationer. Susan told me; and by her account, Lady Flora seems to have taken up immensely with Field: she went there four times last week. I should not imagine his paper and envelopes were first-rate."

"What a gossip Susan is!" said Lucy laughing; "she must have watched Lady Flora very closely."

"She thinks her dreadfully changed," observed Maude.

"So does Robert," said Lucy gravely. "He told me last night he was shocked with the alteration; he says she looked unutterably wretched."

"My dear Lucy, you look as solemn as though you could help it. Aunt Augusta fancies she is hopelessly in love with some one."

"No, Maude, impossible!" exclaimed Lucy in a surprised tone.

"Why not?" said Maude. "It is very

probable. I would not be a daughter of the Countess De Walden for something! Here, Lucy, books, a goodly pile! ‘George Herbert,’ of course, your inseparable travelling companion! What is to be your duty when you are a country parson’s wife?”

Lucy blushed as she received the volume into her outstretched hand. Then came a quantity of music, which Lucy carried away down-stairs.

When she returned, Maude exclaimed, “Of course, Lady Flora will be my sister bridesmaid?”

“I hope so. But, dear Maude, there must be no grand doings. I could not bear them.”

“Nonsense, darling, such a bride ought to have a lovely wedding—oh! Lucy, only six weeks more!” and Maude sighed. Lucy stooped down and kissed her. “You will not miss me, Maude; there will be no separation.”

“I shall miss you every hour of my life! There, never mind,” exclaimed Maude, with a comic *tristesse*, “what can’t be cured must be endured! Robert comes in for the lion’s

share, and I must be content with his leavings!"

Lucy could not help laughing, and Maude laughed also. "It will be the most comical thing in the world to see you a married woman, Lu. How will you comport yourself?"

"I do not know," Lucy replied. "I shall try my best."

"You will know it all in some way, I suppose," said Maude: "look up your parishioners and pay your bills weekly, that is all the advice I can give you."

Lucy smiled, "There will be plenty to do. Old Miss Ferrers always said, her days seemed passed before they began."

"She was an old busy-body!" replied Maude. "Heigh-ho! poor little Lu! you must not kill yourself in the excess of matronly zeal! there, now we have done our share. Susan can clear up the rest; come down into the field."

As Maude rang the bell for their little maid, she quickly brushed away a tear: her love for Lucy was more intense than she had ever imagined it to be. With their

arms twined around each other, the sisters went down into the meadow, where their father was lying among the grass, with his felt hat over his eyes to screen them from the sun. They approached him softly, and Lucy knelt down and kissed him. The Squire started up, "My darlings, what you here!" he exclaimed. "I thought you were deep in unpacking your London finery?"

"And we thought at least you were making hay, papa," said Maude, sinking on a heap of grass. Lucy sat down by the Squire, who put his arm around her.

"Well, my Lucy bird, here we are at home again; and how do you feel?"

"Oh! very happy, papa," said Lucy gently. "The Manor looks so beautiful and sunny, and not at all changed."

"Aye, not one bit. I took precious care of that: you would scarcely know there had been any repairs, except that it is all clean."

"Hills and valleys are better than streets, I do declare," exclaimed Maude, who had looked thoughtful for a moment; "and the



old Manor is better than a tall, straight London house."

"So Missey is not converted to town ways after all?" said the Squire.

"Not in the least," replied Maude. "I enjoyed it all when I was there; but home is a pleasant change. One wearies of London after a season, and is glad to flee from it."

"Well said!" exclaimed the Squire, "our Maude is becoming quite a philosopher. Hurrah for old Forsted, the country for ever!" and up flew the Squire's hat into the air.

"I declare papa is growing quite youthful," said Maude, tossing a handful of hay over her father.

Ever mirthful, up started the Squire, and showers of grass flew around. Maude all life and activity gathered armsfull as fast as her father. Lucy standing by laughed so much as to be unable to render assistance on either side; at length Maude, exhausted with her frolic, yielded; and the Squire picking up his hat and wiping his brows, went away with the girls to the stables, to see the new horse, for which he had given some enormous price. Maude petted and praised the noble animal,

and ended by donning an old riding-skirt, and cantering him round the field, till the dinner-bell rang, when she hurriedly dressed, and took her long forsaken place at the head of the table. Dinner was scarcely concluded, when Robert came in, and then Lucy went a drive with him to the little post-town, and round the hamlets of Sleaford and Branston, returning at sunset to find tea laid out-of-doors under the trees, and Maude awaiting her darling sister at the gates. There was a happy little party at that rural meal, and yet a cloud sometimes passed over the Squire and Maude, when they thought that in six weeks they were to give up their Lucy. August's late days were to see her a bride, and the Manorial home robbed of its sweetest ornament—but there was no reason for delaying the marriage, Maude hated to be selfish; and the Squire tried to forget the parting, and promised himself many an evening at the parsonage—yet Lucy's home-ties would be broken then; she would no longer be entirely theirs.

There was only one thing on returning home which distressed Lucy, though not a

word of fault-finding passed her gentle lips ; and this was the alterations in the church. The suggestions of Lady Anne and Hubert Mostyn, had been carried out by the yielding, complying Robert. A large, handsome bow chancel had been thrown out, sweeping away the vestry and the old Manor pew. Lady Anne's gorgeous carpet, the model from the Marchesa's chapel, decorated the floor with crosses enough to delight all the fathers of the Romish church. The altar-cloth corresponded ; and on it reposed crimson cushions and emblazoned books with crosses on the backs and depending from the markers. The old pulpit stood there still with the oak vizors and helmets so quaintly carved on its front ; but the reading desk was swept away, and a substitute provided. The old square pews were no more ; open sittings occupied their place. Hubert Mostyn had presented the Church with an east window, in beautiful chaste colouring, which would have been very suitable, but for the darkness it threw over the church ; as did the other smaller windows with purple *fleur-de-lis* and gold crosses on an opaque white ground. A handsome low

pew had been built for the Castle, and a corresponding one for the Manor. The church roof was raised, and a disguised cross stood prominent. St. Walburga was the old St. Walburga no longer. Lucy felt this and sighed sadly as she knelt in the new pew on the first home Sunday.

After service was over, the Squire stormed, and Maude was strongly indignant; but Lucy was silent, yet felt more than they. She remained behind in the church-yard, talking to a poor woman; and when they separated, and the whole of the congregation had dispersed, and the church was empty, (it was left unlocked now between services) by an impulse, softly Lucy entered the deserted aisle, and stood where the sun came pouring in over the recumbent crusader ancestor of the Nevilles, and "his fayre ladye, ye Dame Lucie, who was unto her Lord a right lovinge Wife, a Friende to ye poore, and a mercyfulle neighbour unto all who were distressed or needie." So said the monument; and it also recorded that she died in a green old age. As Lucy Neville stood by the "fair Lucie" of the days of Cœur-de-Lion, she folded her

hands, and bowed her head reverently. Then her knee bended on a hassock near, and she prayed that she might be kept from the sorrows of dissention and controversy, and yet never change in her love for Heaven—never suffer show or ornaments to distract her eye from the worship of God and Him alone ! She held a little Bible in her hand ; and when she rose up, her lips pressed it reverently, and she said mentally, “ It is safe here ! ” and suddenly two lines of her favourite George Herbert came to her mind :

“ Starres are poore books, and oftentimes do misse—  
This book of starres lights to eternal blisse.”

A sweet smile played around her lips. She held her Bible fast in her hand ; aye, and its precepts were engraven on her heart ; and she felt no fear. She walked quietly away beneath the old yew trees in the church-yard, her face shaded by her parasol from the July sun, so that she did not see Robert coming towards her, till his voice sounded on her ear. She looked up, and put her hand in his, as she said :

“ I did not expect to meet you, Robert.”

“I saw you remain behind, and came to find you Lucy-bird,” he replied.

“I stopped to speak to poor old Anne, and then I went back to look at the church. I would not allow myself to notice it particularly during the service; so I went again to see the change, and satisfy myself if it were real.”

“You do not like it, dearest?” Robert asked.

“No,” replied Lucy, gravely.

“I could not help it,” he said in a tone of apology. “Lady Anne and Mostyn were determined on having it so. Besides, darling, you must confess alterations were needed. We looked sadly unorthodox before with so much white paint, and such a poor chancel! There was no beauty in it.”

“Robert, dear! is not that church most beautiful where the most heartfelt prayers are said. True hearts are a greater adornment than fine architecture.”

Robert looked thoughtful.

“I thought, darling, you admired fine old churches?” he said.

“Yes, dear Robert, I do. They are so

grand and yet so simple. But never mind if St. Walburga is altered! We can be the same—true to the Bible; and then we must be true to our church.”

She smiled sweetly, and began to speak of other things as Robert accompanied her to the Manor gates. Her gentle silence was more reproof to Robert than any words could have been. Ever wavering, he had begun to change in his clerical views. Hubert Mostyn's society, and Lady Anne's influence, made an impression upon him. He thought their works so holy, their lives so austere, good, that their doctrine must be more than commonly elevated. Mostyn lent him books; Robert read them, and was puzzled. Lady Anne propounded new theories, against which his wavering mind found no argument; and Robert, though outwardly unchanged, was in a fair way to follow on whither his new friends were going, the road that leads to Rome. Cecil was extremely annoyed with the direct opposition to his wishes regarding the church. He was disappointed in Robert. His advice had been unheeded; and yet his kind heart could not blame him. Like Lucy, he tried

soft words, not reproof. Lady Anne gloried in her success, and was satisfied; and Agnese was more than satisfied — she triumphed. Lady Flora alone was indifferent to everything, save the sorrows of her own heart. The Countess grew increasingly cold and stern, and reproached Flora continually for her conduct towards Lord Glendowan, who had written many letters to Flora, beseeching her to pause ere she entirely cast him off — to let him still retain one ray of hope. But Flora replied “it was impossible—hope was gone.”

Sometimes she upbraided herself severely for her clandestine marriage. What had it done for her? She was still an exile from her beloved Archer; still an unhappy inmate of her mother's roof. Why not have waited until his position was elevated? Then, perhaps, her mother's hard heart might have relented. Oh! why had Archer persuaded her? Day after day she wrote imploring letters beseeching him to come to her; and made solitary journeys to Friarsford, that she might herself post them. His answers were written in a disguised hand, begging her to wait a little



longer ; wait for his days of wealth and power, which soon would come ; and then he ran on in a strain so fond, so adoring, that she reproached herself for her misgivings, and yet wept many silent tears over her hard fate.

Lady Flora sat alone one afternoon on the terrace, her face looking careworn and pale, and her eyes anxious and bright, and full of longings after something unfulfilled, her embroidery hanging listlessly from her hands, when Lucy's step was heard on the stone walk. Flora started, and the colour came to her cheeks, as she rose to welcome her friend, and saw Maude following her. They were soon seated all three together, Lucy holding Lady Flora's hand, Maude drumming her parasol on the terrace pavement.

“Flora, dear, we have come to make an old request !” Lucy said, after a little common-place conversation.

Lady Flora's voice trembled as she replied hurriedly, “ Oh, Lucy ! you must indeed forgive me, but I cannot be your bridesmaid. I will come to your wedding, darling, to

please you, but only among the matronly ones; light, gay hearts should be your bride-maidens, not a poor old saddened heart like mine!" Flora smiled a wintry smile, but which lighted up her pensive face, till it almost gave it a beauty.

"But, Flora, dear, why should you continue to be sad, you do not know how incomplete it will be without you? Next to Maude I love you, and you ought to be near me on my wedding day!" Lucy looked up appealingly.

"Besides," Maude began, "what am I to do without support: I had calculated upon your assistance in my post of honour. I think rousing yourself, Lady Flora, would do you good."

"Oh! if I could!" sighed Flora.

Lucy looked at Maude, as if fearing she had said too much; but Maude continued:

"It is to be as quiet an affair as possible: little Lu does not like grand doings, and there are very few relations to ask—you know Robert has none in England except the Tyrrels whom he never sees; and we have

only Aunt Augusta and Uncle Archer. All your family have promised to be present; and with Mr. Lewis to marry them, and Mr. Mostyn as groomsman, and Amy and Kitty Lewis as the other bridesmaids, there will only be fourteen all together. You see it is quite a private affair."

"We shall be very quiet, because papa will feel it less," observed Lucy.

"Lucy, darling girl, I will do anything for you, but your bridesmaid I cannot be. If you love me, ask it not again!" exclaimed Lady Flora, suddenly bursting into tears.

Lucy looked dismayed. Each day Flora became more incomprehensible to her. However, she thought not of her own disappointment, but endeavoured to calm her; upbraiding herself with having urged her wish. Quickly Flora was restored to her usual quietude, and even enquired about the dresses and the arrangements for her tour; and to Maude her conduct appeared more than ever inexplicable.

Lucy's wedding—how Flora longed for, and yet dreaded it! Her husband would

be there ; she would see him, hear his dear voice, oh, bliss ! Yet she must appear as though he were nought to her ; speak to him by stealth ; and perhaps part without one led embrace !

The weeks between her return to the Castle and Lucy's wedding, passed slowly and sadly away. Solitary rambles ; hurried visits to Lucy ; reproachful words from the Countess ; total neglect from the Lady Anne ; such was her dreary lot !

And Lucy ! how did the last few weeks of her maiden life pass ? In increased love and tenderness towards her father and sister ; in visits to the poor ; little arrangements for her new house ; preparations for her simple *trousseau* ; greater forgetfulness of self ; increased thought, care and love for all around. No wonder the villagers called her their " dear little lady ! " No wonder the Squire cried like a child, at the idea of such a slight separation ! No wonder Maude's cheeks glowed with pride at the very mention of her Lucy's name ! And Robert, oh ! he was joy itself. He to become the richest, hap-

piest man in Christendom with the best, sweetest wife! and eagerly he looked forward to the twenty-sixth of August, the day of days to him!

## CHAPTER IX.

Marry thee, marry thee, marry, marry; if thou shouldst marry, marry, thou shalt find good therein, therein, so marry, marry.

LONGFELLOW.

UNCLE ARCHER had arrived, and Aunt Augusta, bringing with her the wedding-dress on the wedding eve. The moon shone brightly and promised a fair morrow; all Forsted were going to take a holiday—no work was to be done on the day that “our Parson married little Miss Neville!” Even Lady Anne seemed roused from her indifference, and had sent to her Sunday scholars an uniform of dark green, the De Walden colour—that they might appear trim and neat on the morrow.

And when the morrow came, it broke forth

gloriously, cloudlessly : no hearts could have desired more sunshine, fewer clouds ! Almost at cock-crow, the ringers mounted the belfry, and set the bells into a joyful peal ; while all the children Forsted contained, who were able to go alone, trooped forth to fields and lanes vying with each other who could cull the freshest and brightest posies to strew "our Miss Lucy's path."

Honey-suckle and roses, corn-flowers, orchis, every variety of plant that grew in those Somerset nooks did the happy children find. What the girls could not reach, the boys scrambled for ; it was a voluntary act of love : no bride had planned it for herself, no school-mistress enforced order ; but there was not a child who did not love Lucy, and delight in strewing her with summer blossoms.

The bells awoke her from her calm, sweet sleep ; they broke on her ears like the melody of a dream. "Think when the bells do chime, 'tis angels music !" They seemed so more than ever to her angel's notes ushering in her wedding-day—it was a happy waking !

She opened the window to let the music in. It rose ; it fell ; loudly, softly, it mingled

with her thoughts, her prayers, her Bible-reading, and hallowed them all.

The bells rang on without ceasing, till near eleven, when the ringers descended from the belfry, to see the sight—and a pretty one it was to view. Sixty children of all ages and sizes, stood on either side the flagged walk leading from the gates to the church door, the girls in front, the boys behind—then matrons and sunburnt men, and veteran labourers, whose life's work was nearly ended, stood among the tombstones to see her and the folks go in.

Mr. Lewis, the rector of Friarsford arrived first, with two fair little girls, and an elder sister, to supply Lady Flora's place, all attired in white, spotless white. Then came the bridegroom slightly agitated, but very happy, accompanied by Cecil Erresford and Hubert Mostyn; after them the Countess and her daughters; then Archer and Miss Neville with Maude; and lastly the Bride in a flowing white muslin dress, (her own choice) a wreath of natural flowers fastening on the veil that hung over her sweet, calm face. Her hand held fast her father's arm. Poor Squire, he was loth to



give her up, and kept that tiny hand as long as possible. Maude was close behind her Lucy, her eyes fixed on her from the time she entered the church till the ceremony was over. She looked beautiful as ever, yet proudly sad, and thought of no one object but her idolized sister.

Behind Maude, trembling, deadly pale and ready to faint, was Lady Flora, her gracefully flowing pale silk and folds of white lace, giving her a bride-like appearance. By her, very, very near, within touch, stood her husband, his lips compressed, his eagle eyes looking proudly down. No one noticed them; no one read the thoughts of their hearts, or dreamt that their fate was in any way linked together. All eyes were fixed on Lucy, as, in the old church, where numbers had seen her seventeen years before baptized; the whole village now heard her marriage vows. Unflinching and clearly she promised to be all in all to her husband, to love him, to honour, to obey. Would she keep her vows? Who could doubt it? And would he love her and cherish her for ever? He said he would in manly tones; then he heard read his duty towards her, hers to him.

He heard the blessing, and the bells break forth above his head, and he knew she was indeed his ; for a long life, or short years, she was his own Lucy : no one could part them—but himself—did he think of that ? No, of nothing but his bride. He watched her tiny hand write the name of her forefathers after her baptismal name once more, and then he led her away in joy and happiness back to her old manorial home.

Oh ! it was a happy wedding. She had trodden through a pathway of flowers, the summer rose and fair eglantine ; and if blessings showering on her as she passed would avail to bring a happy life—oh, what would hers be !

The bells rang on, on. Throughout the breakfast, when all wore bright looks, if not light hearts, the Countess was smiling and gracious, Lady Anne courteous. Lady Flora's sorrow-cloud lightened beneath her husband's whispered tones of love. Maude looked beautiful, and Cecil good and true. The Squire's face was open and honest as ever. Implicitly he trusted his Lucy's husband ; for the rest, Miss Neville was proud of the party ;

and Robert, the principal actor, longed for the concluding speeches to end, and to set out on their quiet little trip to the Channel Isles. On rang the bells ; the air was full of their sound ; even over at Branstone and Friarsford the bells made known that little Lucy Neville was a bride.

“ May Robert ever guard and treasure her lovingly and truly ! ” was Cecil’s heart’s prayer, as he stood looking out on the lawn ; and when Robert, as he brought Lucy down to the carriage, stopped and put her hand in his friend and patron’s, Cecil said warmly : “ God bless you both, and give you every happiness ! ”

“ And may every blessing attend you, Cecil, for without you, I should never have seen this happy day. Lucy, Cecil must be your friend for my sake ; to me he is friend, benefactor, brother, everything.”

Then said Lucy, “ I will be his sister.”

Cecil gently raised her hand to his lips as he said : “ A long and unclouded life to my sweet sister Lucy ! ” and so they parted ; and Cecil felt the nobility of having conquered

his own heart's wishes, and made them subservient to his friendship.

The whole of the wedding party stood on the hall steps to see the bride off—her father held her in his arms with a long embrace, as though he could not bear the parting. Maude bore up proudly, no eye might see her sorrow; it was reserved for nightfall and solitude. No tears were for Lucy; she was agitated, and her sweet face was deadly pale; but when she left the village, her calmness returned.

“Every one has been so extremely kind, Robert,” were the first words she said.

“I do not see how they could act otherwise, dearest Lucy,” he replied.

“Let me be grateful,” she said playfully.

“Everything about you was certainly sun-tipped, my own Lucy, and as you came into the church, the light caught your veil with the loveliest glow imaginable.”

Lucy looked up brightly. “I saw nothing but the crowd of villagers in the churchyard. It is so good of the Countess to feast them

all in the Park ; she could not do more for Lady Flora."

"Forsted will be merry, and you will be the universal theme of applause."

"I cannot help thinking, dear Robert, of all those beautiful flowers which fell around me to-day ; kindness certainly is a wonderful thing—it visits us like a beam from heaven."

"And all the kindness of to-day was perfectly unprompted," observed Robert.

Soon after this, the carriage rattled over the quiet little village of Friarsford. At one of the rectory windows, Mr. Lewis's invalid wife stood watching for the bride ; another window was filled with little heads nodding to Lucy, who kissed her hand as long as they remained in view.

Presently Lucy discovered some clouds gathering in the blue sky, and Robert predicted rain : it continued fine, however, throughout the journey to town. But when the bridal pair were safely lodged in Archer Neville's house, in May-Fair, they were witnesses to a most terrific thunder-storm. Robert said it should have kept off during

their wedding-day; but Lucy thought the rolling thunder and bright flashes of lightning grand, and was not superstitious like the Forsted folks, who regarded the storm as ominous of evil to the fair young bride, who while they shook their heads and grumbled, was quietly occupied in writing a little note to the Squire and Maude, informing them of her happy arrival in town.

Maude smiled brightly while she read Lucy's letter, her father looking over her shoulders as she stood by the drawing-room window waiting for the horses to come round.

“Dear little Lu! you see it is all right, papa, they were safely housed before the thunder-storm.”

“Bless her sweet little letter!” exclaimed the Squire, as he took it from Maude's hand, and put it in his own pocket.

Archer Neville and his sister had gone home again; and Maude, dreary and forlorn without her Lucy, had made up her mind to go with her father after the hounds.

Cecil Erresford had hinted several times,

as they wandered about the grounds after the wedding-breakfast, that he did not like the stamp of men who usually formed the Arminster hunt, and that ladies were better absent; but Maude thought he was dictatorial, and felt a spirit of opposition to his wishes; and as she rode the black horse along side of her father to the hunt, she had a secret hope Cecil would be there to see her spirit of independence and fearlessness. It was strange—but from the day they had first met, she had never liked to yield in any way to Cecil.

A large party met on Dyke Moor, a wild open space between Friarsford and the sea. There were men of every stamp and age, but no lady save the intrepid girl whose proud, pawing horse was the theme of general admiration.

To Maude's great amusement, she descried on a very spirited hunter her London acquaintance and admirer, Count Arlais. Where he came from, it puzzled Maude to conjecture, until he rode up to her side, and explained that he was making a *séjour* with friends at Arminster.

Monsieur le Comte seemed disposed to keep continually near Maude, and was an immense source of entertainment to her; for he knew no more of the management of his horse than a child, and it was diverting to hear Maude telling him that he must have more command over the animal unless he wished to find himself in a ditch.

The Count looked comically terrified, and asked if Miss Neville had no fears. Maude replied laughingly, "none whatever"—and indeed this was very evident, as her reins hung carelessly in her hand, and she looked around unconcernedly at the quaint group. Just then Cecil Erresford rode up, and in a slightly reproachful tone asked :

"What would Mrs. Aylmer say to see you here?"

Maude looked at him a moment, and then burst out laughing.

"I could not in the least imagine whom you meant by Mrs. Aylmer! Lucy never dictated to me; she knew my intention of coming. But what do you think of my horse?" she added, quickly.

"He is a splendid creature; but I fear you



will have some difficulty in keeping your seat."

"You think all women are cowards!" said Maude, disdainfully.

"You do me injustice," exclaimed Cecil.

"Well! we will not quarrel," replied Maude, merrily. "I am at the hunt now, and intend to go through with it, at all hazards. If you should find me in a ditch, perhaps you will kindly stop and help me out."

Cecil looked at Lucy's loved sister, and determined not to leave her to the care of the Count, who was looking unutterable things at his horse's rearing, and ejaculated:

"Oh! *ma foi!*" etc.

"You should give him the rein," exclaimed Maude; "it is a frightfully vicious creature. I know where you got him—at Graves' the Arminster horse-dealer. How could he mount you so ill!" Maude took a great delight in augmenting the Count's fears.

"Oh! *ma foi!* Is it a dangerous country?" asked the poor man.

"Oh! remarkably so—such awful dykes to cross, and hedges and gates to leap. I hope you fall lightly!"

The Count looked agonies when all the the party moved on, Maude by her father's side, the Count keeping close to her for protection. Where Cecil Erresford was, Maude did not know. They crossed the great hilly moor, the dogs running in and out among the low brush-wood, Maude watching them with eager looks, a bright glow on her cheeks, and an expression of merry, mischievous glee in her face at the poor Count's ill-management of his rearing, prancing steed. Suddenly there was a simultaneous shout: the dogs had started a fox. Maude gave an exclamation of delight, then turning to the Count, cried:

“Now comes the tug of war—mind the ditches!”

Then, after that, Maude entirely forgot everything but herself, her horse, and the sense of ease and freedom which the swift passing through the air gave her. She was not at all aware when she became parted from her father, nor when the Count was thrown against a hedge which she had cleared with an almost flying leap. She knew there was another horseman by her, but turned not to enquire who; but dashed

on, one of the foremost in precisely such a *mêlée* as had passed through the Manor grounds, the first day she had seen Cecil Erresford. Occasionally a loud, coarse voice called out, "Well done!" at some almost extraordinary feat of her horsemanship; but she heeded it not, and was too excited to feel any resentment. It was not till after seven miles' hard riding over rough ground, smooth ground and swamp, that as Maude, with six or seven others, came in at the death, she saw Cecil Erresford by her side.

"What! you here!" she exclaimed. "I imagined we had lost you long ago."

Cecil smiled half incredulously:

"I have never left you a moment, from the time we started till now." He might have added: "I followed you for your sister's sake. I was near to guard you as *our* Lucy would have had me do."

"What a helpless child you must think me," Maude said, rather pettishly, as she turned her face up to the sky, which all day had been lowering, and now was sending down large, heavy drops.

“You have not proved yourself helpless,” was Cecil’s quiet reply.

“What has become of Count Arlais?” Maude exclaimed, quickly turning round.

“If you wish to know, I will enquire,” Cecil replied.

Maude thought Mr. Erresford very provoking. He was not her brother! Then why should he keep close to her and follow her about? She rode round near her father. He had dismounted, and was conversing with a little knot of knowing-looking men, with a keen expression of countenance totally unlike his own. One had a sort of memorandum-book in his hand, open, and was talking in a determined, though low tone about payments. A feeling of misgiving passed quick as lightning through Maude’s mind. She could not see her father’s face; but she noticed the impatient movement of his foot, as he moved it up and down, and drummed on his boot with the hooked handle of his whip; and she thought his voice sounded vexed and angry, though the barkings and yelpings of the dogs prevented her hearing distinctly what was said.

An angry oath from the little, puckered-faced man with the book caused her quickly to turn her horse away, and by a strange impulse to look for Cecil. He was not far off, talking to Farmer Perkins, who was telling him how "that there Frenchman was lodged in the first ditch by Wildman's oak." Maude put in a word for the Count, and said he was badly mounted; at which the farmer laughed good-humouredly, and added: "Furreners wasn't good for much with horses!"

Then some of the most important gentlemen present rode up, and complimented Maude on her excellent command of her horse, at the same time presenting her with the brush. Just at this juncture, down came a pelting shower of rain; and the Squire, with rather a troubled expression on his good-humoured face, rode round to Maude's side:

"So I lost sight of you during the sport. I see you have carried off the trophy, eh? and beat the Frenchman out and out!"

Maude looked up at her father. He did not speak in his usual tone. She noticed an excitement about him, and two red spots on

his cheeks; and the interest he took in the compliments his companions in the chase paid his daughter, appeared rather forced than genuine. After those around them had dispersed a little, the Squire asked Cecil abruptly what he intended to do?

“Ride home as fast as I can, now the sport is over, and this pelting rain has commenced.”

“I wish you would see Maude home for me. Will you, Erresford?”

Maude looked appealingly at her father, but he went on. “I have an engagement to keep with one or two of the fellows here.”

“No, come back with me, papa,” exclaimed Maude, who did not like the idea of leaving her father with “the fellows” she had seen him with some short time before.

“Nonsense, Maude,” he replied, “you know I never come home till late after a day’s sport; now go along both of you, it is no fun standing here with all this rain pouring on one!” He spoke with a forced cheerfulness, as he added, “look out for me at seven, and don’t take lion’s share of the dinner, Missey.”

Maude brought her horse very close to her father's, as she almost whispered, "Is there anything wrong, dear papa?"

"Nonsense, child!" he exclaimed again, "what has put such an idea into your head? It is not like you, Maude. Can't I keep appointments with my comrades in the field without you screwing up your pretty face in that manner? There, make haste home, you are keeping your cavalier waiting."

Cecil had moved away a few paces, and Maude joined him in silence. Thus they proceeded some distance till every straggling huntsman was out of sight. Then Cecil in a calm, steady voice said, "Miss Neville, I have something which I wish particularly to say to you."

Maude's heart beat rather quickly: it appeared so like the beginning of a declaration in a novel. What could he mean? For a moment she hesitated what to answer, then thinking how strange her silence must appear, she replied in as indifferent a tone as she could assume, "What is it, Mr. Erresford?"

"It concerns your father," Cecil began—Maude breathed freely again—"I was so

grieved to see him mixed up with that set of scamps to-day; you cannot possibly tell what some of them are. Would not your influence keep him from joining them so much?"

Maude opened wide her large bright eyes, and turning towards Cecil exclaimed, "I could not possibly prevent papa from hunting; but surely there is no harm in it?"

"None in the sport. But, Miss Neville, it is the set of gamblers who I find, regularly frequent the hunt here, that may injure your father." He spoke so seriously, that Maude felt alarmed, and held her breath while he went on, "the coming to-day may not have done much harm; but I fear every time that Mr. Neville joins these men, they draw him deeper into it."

"Into what—betting? exclaimed Maude.

"They all do it to an extent, even Sir Joseph Fairfield; but your father who is so unsuspecting and open, is often taken in, and shamefully imposed upon."

"I do not understand you," Maude said impatiently, "what can I do?"

"A great deal," replied Cecil calmly; "you are his only home daughter now, Miss



Neville ; you know how entirely your father's heart is given to you ; guide him by his love for you ; entice him ; draw him away from his companions ; but, as you value your father's peace, do not take him to them."

"You are upbraiding me for this one harmless hunt," said Maude, hastily, while passionate tears filled her eyes.

"I have nothing to upbraid you with," he replied, in the same quiet tone in which he had been speaking, "and I assure you I should not have mentioned one word to you of this unfortunate subject, but that I believe if any one could save Mr. Neville, it would be his daughter."

"What am I to save my father from?" she asked eagerly.

"From ruin!" he replied. "I have this day discovered how largely your father is in debt to some of the men who were amongst us just now ; still, though this is the case, he can easily be relieved from his embarrassments. But it remains for you to keep him from future harm. Oh ! Miss Neville, form plans for him—turn his mind to anything but this rage for the turf!"

Maude's bright, intelligent face wore a sad and troubled expression, as she said :

“It was I who took him there to-day. I might have kept him from it—he half proposed a ride to Arminster. If I had only not set my mind on this hateful hunt!” then checking her horse so suddenly as to make him rear, she exclaimed, “if any harm happens to him to-day, it is all my doing—I brought him here! Mr. Erresford, we must go back and find papa, and take him away from these people!”

She spoke in a decided, almost peremptory tone; and it required all Cecil's persuasions to prevent her returning. It was not until he had shown her how useless the errand would be, as they were unaware of the place of appointment, besides her father's probable annoyance, that she consented to continue her ride home.

“It is not present interference, but future caution,” he said, as they rode fast on again through the dreary country bordering Dyke Moor.

“This is the first day's pleasure that has ended unhappily,” Maude said, in a gloomy

tone, "I knew everything would go wrong directly Lucy went!" Maude found herself talking quite confidentially to Cecil without knowing the reason.

"Your sister could not have helped this," he said, kindly, "no doubt you will miss her influence; but you will not believe I think less of Mrs. Aylmer, because I say that you alone can do more than you both together."

"How?" exclaimed Maude.

"Because your father will look upon you now as his own peculiar charge, while you had your sister with you, it was different. Now he will not wish you to be solitary, and would, I think, be induced to give up much for your home happiness."

"And I shall seem selfish," replied Maude.

"Selfish for a good purpose," Cecil remarked.

Maude sighed, and was silent for some time, reproaching herself for having taken her father to the hunt, and brought him among those from whom he ought to withdraw: the little dark man with the book

haunted her. If papa owes to him, there will be no mercy, she thought—she had forgotten her companion entirely in her self-accusation, when a gleam of light broke through the dark clouds. “We shall have sunshine yet,” exclaimed Cecil; then noticing the troubled expression on Maude’s countenance, he added, “I am sorry to have made you anxious; your father’s present difficulties can easily be removed.”

“Poor papa! I am sure he does not deserve to have cares,” replied Maude; “no one knows half his goodness except Lucy and myself.”

“Your father possesses universal respect,” Cecil remarked in a cheerful tone; “every one among his companions to-day, except those low fellows, would come forward to say any good word for him.”

“Ah! but that is very different from home appreciation,” said Maude, with a sigh.

“Being loved and understood in one’s home circle is indeed delightful,” replied Cecil: “it is far preferable to a tumult of external applause.”

“That is what Lucy always says,” ex-

claimed Maude. "Oh there is a sunbeam! Cannot we slacken our horses' pace?"

Cecil instantly reined in his horse, saying, "I have been indeed forgetful of you, Miss Neville; and now you are tired."

"No, not exactly, only the stirrup hurts my foot."

In one minute, Cecil was off his horse, and altered her stirrup. "Is that better?" he asked. "I am sure you must have been very uncomfortable all day."

"Rather twisted my ankle felt, but you have made it quite right now." Maude never could persevere in any determination to dislike Cecil: he was as patient and perfectly amiable as Lucy. Maude considered him almost too amiable; and Cecil, as he rode along, thought what a fine, spirited creature Maude was, only wanting a little ray from Lucy to make her perfect—not as her sister; but perfect next to Lucy.

When Cecil left Maude safe at the Manor, she went directly up to her own room, and sat down on her bed-side in her torn, muddy habit, which the last hour's sun had dried into stiff folds. Maude gazed at the other

little bed with its green curtains, and burst into tears. "Oh Lucy, I knew I should do wrong without you!" she exclaimed, "and now I may be papa's ruin. Oh, that hateful hunt!" Poor Maude! her mind conjured up all sorts of dreadful things happening to her beloved father. Duels—overwhelming debts, imprisonment for non-payment—and numberless smaller woes, and all seemed her own doing. She worked herself up into quite a fever of remorse and excitement, until worn out with fatigue of mind and body, she laid down on her bed and fell asleep. She did not know how long she had rested, when she awoke up suddenly, and heard some one calling. "Miss Maude!"

"Is anything the matter? It is quite dark!" she exclaimed, starting to her feet.

"It is ten o'clock, Miss, and master has come home, and he won't have any dinner; and Morris says something is amiss. For master do look so *onlike* hisself!"

"Bring a candle, Susan, how silly of you to come up in the dark!" Maude said hastily, then pressing her hand to her head, she ex-

claimed, "Oh dear, poor me! what would Lucy say, if she were only here to comfort papa!" By the time the slow Susan returned with a light, Maude had taken off her habit and groped her way into the first dress she could find, which happened to be an old cotton one. "There, hold the candle to the glass, Susan. I declare I have not a shade of colour!" and hastily smoothing her hair, Maude dashed past Susan and ran down to her darling father.

Morris had made a fire in the dining-room, and the Squire was leaning over it. He started when Maude came in. "Why, my old girl," he said, "they told me you were asleep!" He spoke cheerfully: but his face as she approached, looked perplexed and worried.

"I am quite awake now, papa," she said, as she rested her hand on his shoulder, and looked anxiously at him.

He drew her down on his knee in silence, and turned his head away.

"Papa!" Maude exclaimed eagerly, "I am your only home one now, and you must let me share all your troubles; though you do

call me 'giddy head' sometimes, I can be steady when I try. Mr. Erresford warned me against going to the hunt. Has anything happened there to harm you? Oh! papa, tell me?" she turned his face towards her, and kissed him tenderly.

"What is it all about, Missey, eh?" he asked. "Erresford! what has he been doing? Why you were sworn enemies a short time ago?"

"Don't think of me, papa. I am often very foolish; talk about yourself. I saw those men—oh! papa, have they made you lose very very much?"

He looked earnestly at her, for a moment. There was something in her face that said, secrets are vain. He drew her head down on his shoulder and said in a low, husky voice: "Maude, my own, I have pretty nearly ruined you!"

Maude left her head where he had placed it, as she asked, "Is it very much, papa?"

"Three thousand pounds—there, you know all!" he said, with a sort of groan. "It is an old score;" he continued, as if by way of excuse. "I began after your mother died,



to drown grief, and I have been getting deeper in it ever since. The fellow was there to-day—he is going off to America and wants his spoil: it must be all paid down by this day week.”

Maude sprang to her feet, a flush of pride suffusing her beautiful face. “Papa!” she exclaimed, “you can sell the Manor, and then I can work for you till we win it back!” \*

“My poor good darling!” the Squire said in a stifled voice.

There was something in his words, that was more than Maude could bear: she sank down on the floor at her father’s feet, and hid her face on his knee. “Papa, darling papa! it was all my doing—I took you there!” she gasped in tones of the most heartfelt distress.

In an instant the Squire was roused; “Why, queen Maude!” he exclaimed, “what is all this? Why we are making a couple of fools of ourselves for nothing! we can patch this business up after all—I dare say. Come, I cannot have you spoil your beautiful eyes with all these tears!” He lifted her gently up and

laid her on the sofa by the fire. "Why Maude, my beauty, you have got hands like stones, and such a pale face! Now I dare say you have not had any dinner, if the truth was known? And it was your first hunt too, and no one to praise you or your horse!"

Maude tried to smile between her gasping sobs, which only made her worse.

The Squire told her she was a naughty child, and taking up from the fender a great joram of brandy and water prepared for himself, sat on the edge of the sofa and fed her with spoonsful.

"Well, I did think Maude was a woman, but I declare she is a worse baby than Lucy! There now, you have got a shade of colour in those cheeks!"

Maude's sobs were becoming less and less; presently she raised herself up, and throwing an arm over her father's neck, said, "Papa, will he not allow any delay?"

"There, don't be foolish," replied the Squire, pretending to be angry, and laying her down again. "I'll tell you what I will do: a thought has struck me, I think it is a bright

one. I will ask Uncle Archer; he is a trump of a saving fellow—and he will lend me the money to pay that old fool; and then I'll begin again, and make a model after all! an old Cecil Erresford, eh, Maude?"

"But will Uncle Archer, papa?" Maude asked anxiously.

"Lor bless you! why Maude, he would have advanced me as much for the repairs of this house, only I would not let him. But I should like to know who put all this stuff into your head. Erresford I suppose—if so, he is a *medlar*, a bad fruit that!"

"Oh, papa, I saw it myself. That dreadful man with a book!"

"Pshaw! you dreamt about it! Never mind, perhaps it is all for the best, I shall be a new man when once I have got out of the old rascal's clutches. I will settle down into an old jog-trot fellow, and look after my pretty daughter, till some one comes to carry her off! Ha, queen Maude! what do you say to being Mrs. Erresford, it would not be bad—would it?"

Maude laughed—"No chance, papa! model men require model wives."

“Then you shall reform as well as I, and then you’ll be fit for him. No, you shall not though, you shall be saucy Maude, always—model men always choose contraries.”

“I think I shall stay with you, papa, and be a model old maid !”

“Ho ! I dare say,” laughed the Squire. “I should like to see that !”

“We shall see, papa, now let me get up. My folly has blown over—and please emancipate me from that horrid stuff.”

“You don’t like my medicine eh ?” said the Squire. “Well since you are a good girl again, I will let you off any more. Only lie still, and do as you are told !”

Maude obeyed, and her eyes followed her father as he slowly pulled a table to the fire, and covered it from the dining-table where Morris had laid some refreshment. Maude laughed at her father’s awkwardness, but he would not allow her to help him ; and when he had completed all his preparations, Maude and her father had a supper together, by the August fire, and cheerfully discussed their first trouble two days after Lucy’s wedding.

Thus joy and sorrow are mingled together—

sometimes one is upwards, then the other, but this scarcely appeared like trouble then—it only seemed to bring forth greater love in father and child.

## CHAPTER X.

His unexhausted mine the sordid vice  
Avarice shows, and virtue is the price.  
Her various motives his ambition raise—  
Pow'r, pomp and splendour, and the thirst of praise.

COWPER.

MAUDE awoke the morning after the hunt with the dreary, oppressive sense of something weighing upon her mind; it was some minutes before she collected her thoughts sufficiently to remember the events of the previous day, but when, at length, they crowded upon her, it was with a feeling of self-upbraiding—she dressed hastily and joined her father, who was that morning going to start for London. Maude begged hard to be allowed to accompany him; but the Squire refused, saying in his usual joking manner, that he

would begin economy at once. Maude sighed and wondered silently how long the economy system would last. It seemed to her as if the cares of life were beginning, and she had always fancied that they would never come near her. Why did they visit her now?

In one thing both the Squire and Maude agreed; they were glad their darling Lucy had married before any trouble had visited them; and it was the Squire's opinion that now she was no longer a home bird, she ought not to hear any of the home anxieties. Maude entirely acquiesced in this—neither the Squire nor herself was selfish.

London looked drear and void as the Squire entered it in a railway cab that evening. Whole streets of houses had their shutters closed, while the windows that were open only revealed curtains and walls carefully covered. Instead of bustle and noise, scarcely a carriage was to be seen; cabs and omnibuses seemed to reign alone. The shop windows had a dowdy, careless appearance; rejected fashions were exhibited to catch inexperienced eyes; shopmen idled at the doors; while the

owners made holidays and played the country gentlemen at their villas *ornées*, a few miles off the stones. In short, London was out of town.

Mr. Neville had never before been in the metropolis at such a season, and he grumbled to himself it was "precious dull;" and he told Archer something to that effect when he reached the house in May-Fair, where the inhabitants were still in existence, Archer professing to have business which detained him in town.

Miss Neville and Archer were not a little surprised at the arrival of their country brother; and Augusta instantly enquired if anything were the matter with Lucy. The Squire replied, Lucy was all right, they had heard from her the previous day, and for ought he knew there might have been another letter this morning, only he could not wait for the post.

Augusta then made pleasant comments on the wedding, and asked how Maude got on without her sister?

"Poor old Maude! I am afraid she is rather dull!" replied the Squire.



“I do not think she finds the Ladies Erresford very companionable,” remarked Augusta.

“Well, no! Flora is Lucy’s pet, and Lady Anne is nobody’s. She thinks of nothing but the schools now, and poor Flora gives herself up to pining away. I never did see such a girl! that wan long face of hers and weary step predict a decline—they had better mind, or they will lose her sooner than they expect.”

Archer checked a rising look of alarm, as he said in a cool tone.

“It is not disease; you may rely it is the mind that has caused the change. That affair with Lord Glendowan, combined with the Countess’s unnatural, chilling conduct, have been too much for her. But time will effect a cure; the youthful mind soon recovers its natural elasticity.”

“Yes!” remarked Augusta, “Lady Flora’s mind being occupied with something new, will cease to dwell on the past?”

“Well, I don’t pretend to be medically learned,” replied the Squire; “but outward

looks are often a true index to the case."

"And outward appearances are often deceptive," observed Archer turning away, "witness the bloom sometimes accompanying pulmonary complaints. Lady Flora has nothing of the kind."

He looked out of the window, and ardently wished for Sir Edgar's death, that he might claim his bride.

It was not till dinner was ended, and Augusta had left her brothers over their wine, to return to her solitary drawing-rooms, that the Squire mentioned the object of his sudden visit.

"Archer, my old fellow!" he began, somewhat abruptly, "I want you to help me."

The lawyer brother leant back in his chair, folded his arms, over his chest, and looking with steady eye at the country brother, replied, in measured tones :

"I shall be very glad to do so, though, of course, I am sorry you should require assistance."

"Well!" continued the Squire frankly, "the

fact is—and I won't hide it—I have been rather extravagant. This world will not always go quite smoothly with us. It has its ups and downs; and at present I am in the downs. Three thousand, Archer—that's the extent of the rub, and only one week to pay it in."

The Squire here drank off a glass of claret, as if to fortify himself against the expected answer.

It came, slowly, and with almost irritating distinctness.

"One week, that is a short time—still it must be done. And to whom is the sum due?"

"To a man named Stubbs, an Arminster fellow; talks of going over to Brother Jonathan next week. I should say England is too hot for him."

"I see," said Archer, with a gleam of satisfaction beneath his cool gaze. "This man is one of a set—a roguish set of knaves who frequent the hunting-field; and he has got you in his clutches. I can get you out once, Phil; but I cannot do it again. I have been a saving man; but I am not rich—far from it."

Squire Neville thought his brother ought to be a rich man to keep up that fine house ; but he believed Archer implicitly, and looked upon the fine house as something of the mysterious that kept itself. And the handsome plate on the sideboard kept itself ; and the rich wines in the cellar kept themselves ; as did the two carriages and eight servants — unsuspecting, overcredulous Squire ! so easily led, so easily deceived !

“ I would not wish you to be involved in difficulties, Archer, old boy, on any account, still less on mine,” the Squire said.

“ You could give me security for the loan, I suppose ?” Archer asked, in an indifferent tone.

“ There is the Manor,” replied the country brother. “ That is all I have got. Let it be a mortgage on that if you like—say ten years, and I will pay you whatever interest you please.”

The lawyer brother paused a moment, then answered in his usual calm manner :

“ Is it not a risk ?—Think of your children.”

“ Well, what am I to do ?” said the Squire,

rather impatiently. "What other security can I give? No one would be answerable for a hair-brained fellow like me."

Archer smiled.

"Ten to one but you will be in the same mess three years hence, Phil."

"We shall see!" ejaculated the Squire, good-humouredly. "Never too late to mend, Sir."

"True," replied Archer; "but late reforms are rather difficult things to build upon."

"Ha! Sir Prudent! you think old fools less hopeful than young ones." The Squire laughed.

"Oh! don't say that. *Nil desperandum*—not even of betting Phil Neville," replied his brother.

The Squire stretched his hand across the table, and gave Archer's a hearty squeeze.

"You are a trump, Archer. I never saw your equal yet."

"That is because you have seen so little of the world," said the lawyer brother, with a slight mixture of compassion and patronage in his voice.

"Lor! I have seen enough of it anyhow,"

replied the Squire ; “and I think it is a rum concern—good and bad all hatched together.”

“True,” acquiesced Archer, coldly.

“I am sure there is no need to go farther than our neighbours at the Castle,” the Squire went on, forgetting all about the question of the loan. “If ever there was a family with variety of character, it is there. The mother is all pride, yet good and neighbourly. There’s the elder daughter all cant ; and the younger, as submissive and unhappy as a forsaken wife ! and then there are the sons : one an idiot, or pretty like it, from all I hear ; and the other as noble a fellow as ever set foot on earth. There’s the world for you in one house !”

Archer did not reply ; but, turning his eagle eyes towards the sideboard, rose and fetched from thence a bottle of port

“Why there’s lots on the table, man !” ejaculated the Squire.

“I know,” replied Archer coldly, “but I want you to try this.”

The Squire was effectually tied down for a while to the respective merits of divers kinds of wine, and when a half hour or so had been

spent in sage comments on the colour and value &c., &c., and tasting the red beverage before them, Augusta, weary of admiring her hands, and trying divers attitudes on divers ottomans, sent to summon her brothers to tea.

The evening being rather cool, Augusta wore a claret-coloured velvet dress and pearl ornaments, and looked oppressively handsome. But the Squire, though he considered his sister the queen of women, yet thought his Lucy in her simple, country dress, with no ornaments, save the goodness that shone in her face, more beautiful.

Archer thought, as Augusta poured out the tea with her diamond glistening fingers, that he would not wish his wife like her. He could not then have always the upper hand, and yet he did not like to hear people talk of Flora as being so submissive and humbled. How he longed for Sir Edgar's death! and by-and-by, so occupied was he with his wish, that he left his splendid sister to entertain the Squire, and taking up his hat, walked to Grosvenor Place, and gently ringing a bell, made inquiries after Sir Edgar. The Baronet was suffering under

an attack of rheumatism and gout combined ; and Archer was very hopeful—the servant's face increased his hopes—and the servant's words were better still—his master had not slept since yesterday, and one of his physicians had given him up.

Archer looked very dolorous, and left his card, and his sympathy for my Lady, who burnt the card, and smiled scornfully at the sympathy. It was an empty sounding word, from a man who had drawn out the will and witnessed the signature that would make him heir to her dying husband's darling wealth.

But Archer knew not her Ladyship's thoughts, nor cared what they were. He went to his club, and wrote his wife a hopeful letter, which she fetched from Friarsford, and cried over.

While the mail was conveying solace to the poor wife's sad heart, her husband magnanimously put his brother in possession of the three thousand, and received a bond with the Squire's own honest signature affixed, a bond that Archer locked in his safest iron box. After so many years of longing and anxiety was he master of a document which in all



probability, ten years hence, would give him the coveted Manor; for he was sure that now his brother had once begun to borrow, he would continue doing so until he had received the full value of the property; and the interest was so good that Archer was in every way the gainer. So his desires were fast fulfilling; he had won his titled wife, with her rank and property; and now he waited anxiously for Sir Edgar's death, and then his proud hopes would be all realized.

How the Squire was to repay his brother, would have puzzled another man; but honest Phil Neville imagined a few years' economy would do it; and he returned home content with the result of his journey; paid his debts; and began to play the domestic man by endeavouring to assist Maude in the arrangement of Lucy's books at the vicarage, thereby considerably retarding her progress. Maude was very glad to have her father with her, in spite of his awkward attempts at assistance, for she dreaded him again meeting his former associates. She sighed when she thought of ten years hence; but it was a long time to come, and she hoped that ere then, they would be

able to pay the debt, and save the dear old Manor, her father's home, and her own. Maude thought her Uncle might as well have lent the required money without taking their all as a security. She was learning something new, she had learnt now what a mortgage was ; but she did not know the avarice that had prompted it.

Meanwhile Archer's drooping wife continued unchanged. Her family had become accustomed to her melancholy moods, and heeded them not. The only thing that seemed to amuse her now, was wool-work, which carried her so often to the fancy shop at Friarsford. The Countess little guessed the real object concealed beneath the repeated purchase of the various kinds of wool. Who could have imagined the secret correspondence she carried there, in answer to Archer's letters addressed in a disguised hand to "Lady Flora Erresford." Oh ! how she longed for the time to come when she might proclaim her rightful name !

Old Mrs. Field, who stamped the letters, made comment what a good niece Miss Maude was, to write so often to Mr. Archer. It was

very pretty of her ! to which her “ gude man ” replied—“ Ah ! she is the right sort of young lady !”

No one said the same of Flora : she was too completely absorbed in herself, and her own miseries, to have a thought of gaining other love than Archer’s.

Again Sir Edgar recovered from an illness which all around him thought would prove fatal. A few days before Lucy’s wedding, the long-delayed will had been at length made, and Archer’s uncertainty came to an end. Sir Edgar’s name and property were to descend to the grasping lawyer. The former, Archer would willingly have dispensed with ; but finding it inseparable from the latter, he raised no objections, and thus usurped the place Robert ought rightfully to have occupied, and for which his uncle had formerly destined him. Lady Tyrrell’s disapprobation of the step her husband had taken, was great. The landed property, consisting of several estates was to be hers ; but Sir Edgar had all his life-time resolved to leave his funded property to some relative, on condition of his taking his name. Now Robert Aylmer was his nearest relation,

and consequently had the greatest claim upon him. But Sir Edgar had taken a dislike to him in his youth ; which dislike, was of later years fostered by his godson, Archer Neville, whom, at length, the Baronet determined on making his heir. Lady Tyrrell would rather that heir had been any one than Archer, but her wishes in behalf of Robert and Mildred were in vain. It was Archer who devoted himself to the fretful old man's every whim. It was Archer who remained in town when the season was over to be near Sir Edgar ; and it was Archer alone who had any influence over him.

“We shall have you a great man some day, Archer,” Sir Edgar said one evening. “I only hope I may live to see you in Parliament.”

Archer wished ardently Sir Edgar might not have that happiness, but hypocritically expressed earnest desires that Sir Edgar might yet have strength and health to harangue the House.

“No, no, old boy ! my days are over for that sort of thing. I was a leading man in my time, and now you must take my place.

Next election, we must have you on the hustings for Arminster; you ought to get plenty of votes—you a Forsted man!"

"That depends on Mr. Neville's views," said Lady Tyrrell.

"There will be all our interest, Sarah," said Sir Edgar complacently, "and then there's the Squire and the De Walden family; oh! and lots I could beat up!"

"Sir Edgar," remarked his godson with a bland smile, "you could not expect of me the same success you have experienced?"

"I expect great things of you, and so does all the world. We look to you to become one of the leading men of our day."

Archer bowed, "My dear Sir, you do me great honour."

"The name deserves great things. Three generations of Tyrrells have sat in Parliament, without having the wealth to support them, which I shall leave you."

"There is no blessing on wealth unless it is well used," Lady Tyrrell said shortly.

"Ah! you were thinking of your favourite, Glendowan. He certainly employs his money

to some purpose ! What a fine fellow that is !” said Sir Edgar.

“ Excellent member of society !” acquiesced Archer.

“ He has been sadly disappointed though. It is a pity ladies don’t know their own minds better—” Sir Edgar grumbled.

“ Lady Flora is a most strange person,” observed Lady Tyrrell.

“ She makes it the business of her life to be miserable, and cultivate doleful looks. I never saw such a long, woe-begone face as hers !” said Sir Edgar.

Archer felt the words, “ You old rascal !” on his lips at the mention of his wife’s name, but turned the expression into one of excuse for Lady Flora, pleading her health as the most likely cause for her melancholy appearance.

Sir Edgar said she was of a sour disposition ; while Lady Tyrrell suggested a probable fancy for some one without the reach of the Countess’s consent, and her own rank of life. Nothing but this Lady Tyrrell felt sure would have induced her to break off with Lord Glendowan.

“ Well, whatever it is, I only hope she will not make a runaway marriage, for of all abominable things, I think that is the worst. You agree with me, Archer? Most trying to a girl’s family !”

“ Very much so,” said the politic Archer.

“ We must look out for an heiress for you,” said Sir Edgar. “ Lady Julia Rich has a handsome daughter, thirty thousand in the way.”

“ I am afraid Miss Rich has higher pretensions,” replied Archer modestly.

“ Come, I must have you think more of yourself. Miss Rich would be just the thing ; her mother is of noble blood, but her father a commoner in your profession. We will introduce you by-and-by, eh, Sarah ?”

“ Miss Rich, my dear Sir Edgar, is engaged already to one of the Mortimers.”

“ Bother the girl !” exclaimed Sir Edgar impatiently, “ what do you say to Lady Anne Erresford ? Lots of money there ?”

“ Lady Anne is too austere for me,” said his godson. “ I think her life is devoted to the church.”

“More fool she! I will not give you that sister of hers: she is no fit wife for a rising man like you, a poor lack-a-daisical, whimsical girl, she would fall in love with you one day, and refuse you the next! Lor! why there are heiresses by the dozen, if we could only hit on the right one!”

“You must let me give up matrimony for the present. I must get my sister off first.”

“Was there ever such a devoted brother!” Sir Edgar said, when Archer was gone; to which Lady Tyrrell gave short and quick answer, “I am convinced he would make a very bad husband.”

“He would teach his wife not to interfere in her husband’s concerns,” said Sir Edgar surlily.

“If he did not teach her to hate him,” her Ladyship replied, rising with a half-checked sigh.



## CHAPTER XI.

*Cathrina.* Hast thou ne'er heard the story of Count Hugo,  
His ancestor, who slew the hunter knight ?

*Orra (eagerly).* Tell it, I pray thee.

\* \* \* \*

Tell it Cathrina, for the life within me  
Beats thick, and stirs to hear it.

JOANNA BAILLIE.

A SIGHING, howling wind hovered around the walls of Castle St. Agnes on a November evening. The fire burnt low in the grate, and long shadows fell on the library floor. Lady Flora, Lucy Aylmer, and Maude sat close around the hearth. Lucy had a cushion on the rug, that she might see by the fire-light the thick grey comforter she was knitting for Robert's Christmas present,

which was to be accompanied by a pair of muffatees of the same colour. Maude was making paper matches out of old letters. Lady Flora held the old letters in her lap, and did nothing but sit dreamily looking at the coals. Presently the door opened. Lucy instantly concealed her work under Lady Flora's apron, then withdrew it with a happy, bright little laugh that sounded pleasantly on Cecil Erresford's ears as he entered the room.

"Secrets going on here?" he asked, as Maude made room for him by the fire.

"Yes! and if we allow you to remain, you must promise not to betray them. Our good little wife is making a secret comforter for her husband."

They all laughed at Maude's droll manner of expressing herself.

"I do not imagine the 'secret comforter' maker can see;" Cecil said, poking the log that now burnt low, in the vain effort of provoking a bright flame. All the log did, however, was to throw sparks in their faces, and then relapse into greater darkness in a revengeful way. Lucy drew her cushion

away from the centre of the rug, and established herself in a corner at Lady Flora's feet with her hand on her lap.

"The 'secret comforter' has removed herself and her mission," Cecil said. "Mrs. Aylmer, would you not like a light? I will make an illumination with the candles on the mantel-piece until something better arrives."

"Pray do not!" exclaimed Maude, "oh! Mr. Erresford, you are spoiling our cosiness!"

"Cecil, this is such a soothing light. Do not break it," added his sister.

"The 'secret comforter' shall be our arbitrator," replied Cecil, holding up a match he had stolen from Maude's heap, and lighting it, he exclaimed, "Mrs. Aylmer, to be or not?"

"Oh, *not* decidedly!" said Lucy laughing.

Cecil threw the match into the fire, Maude declaring it was a "horrid waste!" Just then, a shriek of wind danced along. Maude said, she was certain all the ghosts were out that night, and that the furies were holding a *soirée*!

“That reminds me,” exclaimed Lucy suddenly, “it is nearly a year ago now, since you promised Flora and me, the ghost’s story connected with Flora’s turret. Do you not remember, Mr. Erresford?”

“I believe I do,” replied Cecil, “but recollect it is very shocking, and requires nerve, or rather, properly speaking, no nerves.”

“Oh! we have none here!” said Maude, charmed at the prospect of a ghost’s story, the delight of her childish days.

“Flora and I will compose ours—will we not, Flora?” said Lucy.

“Yes! for I ought to know the legend of my turret. Sit down, Cecil, and begin; it is just the night.”

“Yes!” added Lucy, coaxingly, “you told us that evening, there was too much light, and no howling winds. And there are darkness and wind enough now.”

Cecil drew his chair in among the little group as he said: “The idea of a sage personage like Mrs. Aylmer taking an interest in ghosts!”

“What would the parson say?” asked Maude, slyly.

“That we ought to have reserved it until he arrived,” replied Lucy, with a pretty colour on her fair face.

“The Church would denounce me as a wizard,” said Cecil; “no, fair lady, in the ears of the laity alone is my history to be unfolded.”

Maude jumped up and locked the door.

“Come begin!” she exclaimed.

“Begin what?” said Cecil. “To tell how some two years back those steep stairs were seldom mounted; and except when some servant, more daring than the rest, unlocked the heavy door, and removed the long collected dust; silence reigned supreme in the Ghost’s Turret! Yes, that is its name, truly a gloomy one, and gloomy sounds are heard there too. All the wailing winds rushing from the northern realms, sigh and groan around the rough stone walls, crumbled and worn by those warring blasts, and the door creaks, and the narrow windows flap in wild fury. In such nights as this, are ghosts said to come forth, and servants

refuse to ascend the stairs unaccompanied, and the Lady of the Studio alone is fearless.”

Cecil paused and looked around. Lucy had linked her hands both together on Lady Flora's lap—her fair head rested on them, and a childish, wonder-loving look was on her face. Flora had an arm around her; a glimmer of light flickered over her pale countenance; and her large, soft eyes were fixed in anxious attention on her brother. Maude's bright face had a half-laughing, half-frightened expression. She had ceased twisting her long matches, and her eyes gazed on the white, charred end of the log, resting half out of the fire.

There was such profound attention, and such profound silence, that Cecil was fain to commence at once the legend of the “Ghost's Turret.”

“A strange, weird tale was connected years gone by with Flora's turret,” he began, in mysterious tones, “wild and fearful to hear, and yet each guest at Castle St. Agnes learnt it; aye, and was visited by it in his dreams. It was related that

in the early part of the reign of King John, the third Earl De Walden had an only daughter, fair and innocent, and very lovely to look upon—insomuch that her eyes were like violets in their softness, and her cheeks like the wild rose that grows by the hill-side.

“The Earl, her father, was an imperious, overbearing man, said, by report, to have sent his wife to her grave, and his son to ruin by his tyranny—but let rumour rest in peace. He told the world he loved his Sybil, and the world gave heed to his voice. Yet, though he lavished fair and costly jewels and brilliant attire on his daughter, her young life was not happy, and she looked forward to the time of marriage as a time of release from her father’s gloomy castle, and his stern, proud bearing. But the Earl destined it otherwise. Two persons loved the ladye of St. Agnes: the one, a young Knight, handsome, noble—but poor—to him she gave her heart. The other was a noble, already the age of her father with nought to recommend him but that he was rich and powerful. He sued the Earl de Walden for the

hand of his daughter and did not sue in vain. The noble father promised him the Ladye Sybil with lands and dower; but he could not give the ladye's heart, for though he knew it not, Knight Amyas of the Cross held that already. He had carried it with him to the Holy Wars, and on the day Earl Nevis held council respecting the Ladye Sybil—the young Knight rode with his esquire into the paved court of her father's castle. Great was the anger of the Earl of St. Agnes, when he learnt his daughter's secret vows. He summoned her from her bower to his vaulted hall; and there, in the presence of the young knight, gave her in betrothal to the Earl Nevis. Anguish and terror struck the lady's heart, and she swooned away. Her bower damsels were summoned, and herself carried from the armed presence. Then had the St. Agnes retainers orders to conduct Knight Amyas over the drawbridge; and the Earl breathed a mighty oath, that did he venture again within the walls, his blood should pay the price of his rashness.

“ Loud and bitterly laughed the knight; and his trumpet blew a shrill and menacing blast,



as his good steed bore him away to the Dorset hills, where his poor Keep stood. Three suns rose and the lady wept sore in her bower, and her maidens found no comfort for her ; on the fourth day, she desired to see her priest, and unto him she made full confession of her griefs ; and her concluding words were, ‘ Holy Father, help me !’

“ Then the venerable churchman’s heart pondered within him, for he loved the maiden as a daughter; but he went from her presence in silence. Then sorer than ever was her heart, for another sunrise and yet another—and the final vows were to be pronounced, and Earl Nevis would carry her to his castle on the borders of the sea.

“ ’Twas midnight ; the warders slept ; when forth stole the priest with the ladye by his side, bound for St. Winifred’s Keep, the strong-hold of Sir Amyas, who with his trusty followers, met them at the postern. then into the chapel in procession they repaired, and with book and blessing, the priest united the knight and the ladye.

Here Maude called out, “ Oh, I am so glad !”

“ Lucy smiled, and Lady Flora’s face wore a fearful look of palor as she drew back from the blaze which Cecil had created by heaping on more logs.

“ Scarcely had the fugitive bride, resumed Cecil, arisen from her knees, when her father’s war-cry was heard.

“ ‘ To the postern ! ’ shouted Sir Amyas to his men, as he himself carried the trembling Sybil to a place of safety, and bade the priest watch over her.

“ Then was the conflict sharp, Sir Amyas and his followers wielded the swords that had done good service against the Infidels. At first victory crowned their arms — then numbers triumphed—foremost fell the priest, who had left the Lady Sybil to join the fight—then man after man, bravely defending the postern. Sir Amyas alone seemed clad with invincible armour. He had slain twelve of the St. Agnes retainers, when from within a terrible cry was heard. Through a secret passage in the hill-side, a deserter from his ranks, led a handful of the besiegers into the Keep, and they were carrying off the ladye !

“Then fierce was the Knight’s wrath; and abandoning the postern to his men, he pursued the armed band to the mouth of the secret passage in the vain hope of rescuing his newly-made bride—when a sword pierced his armour and he fell!”

“Ah poor fellow!” exclaimed Maude, “and Sybil?”

“And Sybil,” proceeded Cecil, “was carried back to her father’s castle, and there incarcerated in the Ghost’s Tower, until she should repent and marry Earl Nevis; but says my tale, Earl Nevis was made of kindly stuff, and ceased to press his suit, and betaking himself to his castle, troubled the ladye no more.

“The Earl De Walden grew more and more wroth, and refused to see his daughter’s face, which became wan and sad in her solitary tower, around which the winds from the sea blew, and the rats performed in the walls their nocturnal gambols. For many long months, the Ladye Sybil languished here, when one day an arrow flew in through the casement, and round it was tied a parchment covered with writing. It told her how Sir

Amyas (for it was from him,) had been wounded and not killed, in the attack on St. Winifred's Keep; how he had miraculously escaped from the ruins, after they had been fired by the Earl's bowmen; and how ever since he had been collecting armed men to assail the castle, and carry her away to the shores of Brittany, where dwelt a powerful uncle; and he bade her hope on a few more weeks, and then his war-cry would sound beneath her windows, for he only awaited sufficient numbers to prevent a repulse and ensure the success of his scheme. And Sybil hoped and watched. A month passed by, yet her knight came not.

“In the meantime, her father had become entangled in broils with a neighbouring Baron; and lost much treasure and many men — when, at length, the Baron made peace; it was as claimant of the hand of the Earl's daughter.

“Twice had Sybil attempted flight; twice was she pursued and brought back, and now day by day did she stand at the window awaiting the coming of her husband. It was sundown of a watchful day, when the bolts of

her prison creaked, and the Baron came in alone. He pressed his suit—she refuted it ; he insisted—it maddened her—she clung to the window bars till her father entered, and with unsheathed dagger, bade her choose between the Baron and death ! Then wildly she flung herself into the paved court below, and her cry as she fell was :

“ ‘ Earl, I have spared you the sin of murder, —but you shall see me again !’

“ The two nobles stood a moment aghast, then fled in different directions. They escaped in time. Another half-hour and Sir Amyas with a band of knights crossed the draw-bridge to his ladye’s rescue. But too late—death had sealed her fate.

“ The knight kissed her cold brow, dipped a kerchief in her blood and vowed revenge. And day and night, month and year, did he relentlessly pursue her murderous father. Thrice had they met sword to sword—thrice had the Earl escaped.

“ It was mid-winter—awful winds like demonical spirits groaned and hissed in wild fury around the turrets of Castle St. Agnes,

and the snow and rain beat thunderingly against the Ghost's Tower.

“The Earl De Walden, hunted, conscious-stricken and wearied—took refuge once more in his ancestral home, hoping thereby to escape the vigilance of his dauntless pursuers. He trusted the day of vengeance was over, and he sat down once more to his flagon in the banqueting hall.

“Hist! what sounds? 'tis a war-trumpet that mounts above the shrieks of the wind. 'Tis Sir Amyas, the Knight of the Black Cross and his armed retinue! they have passed the postern—horror and confusion! how can the handful of retainers hold out against Knight Amyas and his powerful band!

“The Earl flies for his life, horror-stricken to the turret of his murdered child—the door is barred, but in vain—Sir Amyas defies all resistance. Ten years have passed since the dark day, and the murdered Sybil's father and husband stand face to face, sword in hand. When between them, arrayed in draperies besmeared with blood, rises the form of Sybil, grief on her brow, an angel's look on

her face ! With bleeding hands she stays for a moment the knight's uplifted sword ; but the revenge of years is not to be stopped even by the weird and ghostly apparition, and the Earl De Walden perishes. From that day, says the tradition, the murdered Earl and his daughter dance around the battlements of the Ghost's Turret when the moon is full !”

Cecil's voice ceased ; and a hand tried the door. Maude shrieked ; but Lucy rose and unlocked it.

“ What is happening here ?” asked the pleasant voice of Robert.

“ Only a ghost story—such a beauty, with a dreadful end !” and his little wife put her hand in his, and drew him towards the fire. She and Maude had been passing the day at Castle St. Agnes ; and Robert had come to join them with the Squire, who was now in the drawing-room.

“ Who raised the ghost ? You, Cecil, I know—you look like a necromancer. Ah ! old fellow ! I recollect the tales of our school-boy days. What was it now ?—the “ Old Man of the Owl Gate,” or the “ Black Cave ?” ”

“Oh! nothing half so terrific—only the tradition of Flora’s Tower.”

“Ah! I recollect how you nearly frightened young Elsdale out of his wits at Eton with that legend. No wonder Maude shrieked. I declare she is trembling still,” said Robert, putting his hand on her arm.

“It was positively awful,” said Maude. “Do let us have a blaze. We require it after such a dreadful story. The fire is quite low.”

Cecil laughed at her, and lighted a taper on the mantel-piece. Then the light fell on the still figure of Lady Flora.

“I say, Flora, my dear girl!” exclaimed Cecil, “I had no idea that I had terrified you.”

“It is nothing,” gasped Flora, as Lucy, unclasping the little hands that had clung so lovingly to her husband’s arm, stooped caressingly over her.

Maude was going to dash off for her maid; but Cecil restrained her.

“Wait a moment,” he said. “She will recover presently. Flora would not like my mother to know she was ill.”



Lucy slipped away in the dark, and returned instantly with some salts, nobody knew from where.

“Flora, darling,” she said, kneeling by her side, and gently rubbing the shivering girl’s hands, “It was only a story—nothing true. I am so sorry it frightened you, darling.”

Cecil put his arm round his sister and supported her, while Maude and Robert looked on, very sorry, but very useless.

A shudder ran through Flora’s frame, and her teeth chattered. Again Lucy glided away, and brought her a glass of wine she had obtained from one of the servants, without any questions being asked. Lucy had such a quiet way of doing things !

After taking this, Lady Flora revived. A flush of colour came to her cheeks ; and she said, in broken gasps—how silly she was, and how sorry she was she had given them so much trouble. And she smiled on Cecil, and kissing Lucy, begged no one else might know anything—how foolish she had been. They all promised not to mention it ; and just at that moment, the dressing-bell rang, and Flora went up to her own room without assistance,

leaving a feeling of pity and sadness in the hearts of those around her. Cecil pondered over her sudden illness, while he prepared for dinner, and felt convinced that there was something more connected with her altered appearance than he could discover.

Little Lucy Aylmer, in her simple light silk, was the married lady of that dinner. Poor Lady Flora, in her elegant black lace, only the younger sister of the party, was subject to rebuffs and imperative commands. She did not envy Lucy, but she felt weary of her false position, weary of waiting for a husband who, like Sybil's, had only been hers on the wedding-day. That ghost story made her very wretched. It seemed so exactly as if Cecil had discerned her secret, and had related the legend in direct allusion to her. But yet she knew it could not be so. Were Cecil in possession of her secret, he would never have chosen that way of making it known to her.

Lucy sang sweetly that evening, and was as cheerful as possible; while Maude amused the whole party with her merry ways. The Countess mentally contrasted the two sisters with Flora; and the contrast was anything

but in Flora's favour. When her guests were gone, Lady de Walden turned to Flora, who was bending over some flowers :

"Has anything happened to you? You do look more than usually wretched."

"I am rather wearied, mamma."

"Then why, my dear, do you not retire? Rest will be the best thing for you."

"Oh! I am not at all sleepy, mamma," replied Flora, who was so utterly inspired with terror by the ghost story, that she dreaded the night.

"Do you know, Flora, it makes me wretched to look at you," continued the Countess. "What is to be done for you? I really think I shall emigrate to Madeira, if you continue wasting away as you have done the last six months."

"Perhaps the cold weather will revive me," replied Flora, patiently.

"I think Flora and I will go and winter in Rome," exclaimed Cecil. "I declare you do require a change." He went up to her, and put his arm round her waist. \*

She nearly began to cry as she said :

"I shall do very well here, thank you."

She was not afraid of Rome on account of Lord Glendowan. He had long since returned to the Highlands. But she dreaded a greater separation from her husband.

“But I do not think it is ‘very well, thank you,’” continued her brother, smiling. “You look so pale and shadowy among that black lace. I shall be obliged to carry you from town to town, to all the foreign physicians, as a patient baffling medical skill.”

“It is ridiculous, Flora, to put on that black lace while you look so ill,” remarked Lady Anne, replacing some chessmen she and the Squire had been using. “You should brighten up with a little pink.”

“Oh! my dear Anne, pink is not at all becoming to her; it makes her look quite deadly,” said the Countess. “Indeed, I do not know what she ought to wear—it baffles all poor Stevens’ skill. Flora will persist in looking like a ghost.”

Cecil felt Flora shudder at the word, and he said playfully, “I will not have Flora found fault with. I will buy her a dress that will suit her admirably, a peach silk, I saw the other day, at Arminster; neither too killing

nor too trying. I believe I have hit on the right scientific words!" Then to change the conversation he said, "So your friend, Archer Neville, is made Sergeant-at-law?"

Flora wished her brother's arm were not round her, for a thrill shot through her frame. She scarcely dared remain, and yet she longed to hear all, so she gently slipped away from Cecil's arm, and sat down on a sofa, trembling and eager at the mention of her husband's name.

"When did you hear this, Cecil?" the Countess asked.

Mr. Neville told me after you had left the dinner-table, and not a little proud he seems. He imagined we had all seen it in the 'Times.'

"I am confident Archer Neville will rise to great things one day," remarked Lady Anne; "but he is a sort of man I never could like."

"So different from his brother," observed the Countess, "so impenetrable a person! You can scarcely understand him, and yet his conversation is wonderful, I have thoroughly enjoyed it many times. I think if he were to

marry, it might dispel that outer crust of ice."

"His sister makes his house too comfortable, I suspect," said Cecil; "and, indeed, I cannot quite imagine the sort of woman who would marry him."

"Nor I," replied the Countess. "It must be some one very young and weak, who had never had any attention shown her before. I cannot picture him a lover; indeed I do not think there can be much love in his composition. He never appeared to me particularly affectionate to his nieces, when that sweet Lucy finds her way into every one's heart."

"A pretty little doll!" remarked Lady Anne, with a slight curl of her proud lip.

"No, Anne, that description does not do her justice," rejoined the Countess. "She is something so entirely out of the common—so ethereal, I might almost say, that it is useless attempting to describe her."

Lady Anne threw back her head: she did not like to hear Lucy's praises, so she said, "That old wonder, Sir Edgar Tyrrell, appears, from all accounts, to have taken a new lease

of his life. It is quite marvellous how he shakes off attack after attack."

"And that will," added Cecil smiling, "I wonder if it is at last made, and on whom the thunder-shock of his fortune will fall. Nothing that concerns the wonderful document would surprise me; if suddenly his huntsman, or Lady Tyrrell's maid, or the crossing-sweeper—or anyone, were to come in for his property!"

"It appears to me so entirely clear, that he ought to leave it to Mr. Aylmer and his sister," said the Countess; "it is but common justice."

"Poor Mildred and Robert were both unfortunate in offending the old man," observed Cecil.

"Now, I should not wonder, if after all, Archer Neville were to come in for a great part of it," said Lady Anne. "He is Sir Edgar's godson, and constantly about him; and the crafty lawyer knows how to make use of his senses."

Lady Flora sat perfectly still, looking intently at her sister. Something seemed to flash upon her, for a pink colour passed across

her pale face, and her lips parted, but she did not speak.

“As to Mrs. St. John coming in for a legacy, there is no chance, for she married against their will,” continued Lady Anne.

“Lady Tyrrell has quite forgiven her,” said Cecil. “I never saw a woman so changed. She has been learning to love ‘her enemies,’ as she used to call poor St. John and his wife.”

“I do not blame Mrs. St. John for marrying, for her husband’s family is a good one; but it was enough to irritate a mother, much more one who was not a near relation. I could never forgive any one belonging to me who perpetrated a clandestine marriage. I think it is a most wicked thing!” said the Countess.

“I shall know how to act now you have given your opinion,” rejoined Cecil laughing.

The Countess smiled at her own vehemence. “Oh! I am not afraid of any one here doing anything of the kind. You and Anne are much too prudent; and as to poor Flora, she is too modest and timid—come, Flora;” she



continued, turning towards her, "I cannot allow you so sit shivering there any longer—Come, my dear, I shall see you to your room." The Countess gave her an arm, and led her away, after throwing a shawl over her shoulders.

Six months had made a sad change in poor Flora, and the face reflected in her toilet-glass did not look like the face that had first looked in that glass, that very day year. Flora was so exhausted and feeble, her maid could scarcely undress her; and then she feared leaving her for the night—lest she should faint away.

Lady Flora felt thankful when Stevens offered to sit up with her till she should feel rested and inclined to sleep. The ghost story was haunting her. Sybil's fate was like her own.

Archer was waiting for money till he claimed her. Nearly five months he had put her off on the plea of his relation's will—and now, a sudden light had dawned on her, could the relation be his godfather, Sir Edgar Tyrrell? If so, was he grasping after the orphan's portion? Oh! it could not—it must not be! Her beloved,

her noble-minded Archer, could not stoop to be so base !

She prayed it might not be so, and she also prayed that if Archer were not to join her, she might die soon, for her life was very weary to her !

## CHAPTER XII.

What joy have I without thee? What delight?  
Grief wastes my life, and makes it misery;  
Day for the others ever, but for me  
For ever night! for ever night!  
When he is gone, 'tis dark! my soul is sad!

LONGFELLOW.

It was nearly midnight on the 23rd of December; the fire in Archer Neville's study had burnt low, and then gone out, while Archer sat in his elbow-chair, his brows knit, his arms crossed, his thoughts pondering deeply and earnestly. He had sat thus for a full hour, scarce lifting his eyes from the table on which they were fixed. It could be no common thing that thus engrossed him. Was it the intricate case of a client that had occu-

ped him fully during the past week, and on which his professional reputation might be staked?

Ah no! he thought of his sad, forsaken wife, one of whose touching, imploring letters lay before him; he thought of the meeting so soon to take place between them; and how could he then withstand her entreaties to be allowed to join him—how put her off any longer with the old, worn out excuse of the will? And yet to forfeit that will would be to Archer as forfeiting life itself—the will, that was to aggrandize him—to raise him. He lived in the daily fear of Flora joining him—leaving the Castle and throwing herself upon his love. There was not a day when Archer returned from his chambers, that he did not expect to find her by his fireside. And yet his heart did not upbraid him for having persuaded her to their clandestine marriage. He did it from expediency, to secure the Lady Flora, who, he foresaw in his long separation, if not his by more than promise, might become reconciled to Lord Glendowan, or even meet with some new and approved *prétendant* to her hand. But these fears could not exist

now. She was his, irrevocably his. The Countess's storms and Lady Anne's proud sneer, could not put asunder those, who in that dark gloomy little church had been joined together.

Archer so much feared meeting his wife, that he was on the point of relinquishing his annual visit to the Manor, but that no plausible excuse presented itself ; and, at length, the longing to see his Flora conquered the dread. How he wished a fit, an accident, or anything would carry off Sir Edgar that night, and so enable him to claim her ! The love of money is the root of all evil ! so says the inspired volume. It was so with Archer : it caused him to long for the death of his generous friend and benefactor. It kept him from his wife, and made her heart-broken and wretched ! What availed wealth to her ? It could not ease her troubled heart, or heal her broken spirit ? Only love could effect that. Ah, yes ! love is all powerful, where riches are as dross ! But Archer reasoned not thus.

It was on the following Christmas morning that Archer saw for the second time, since their marriage, the Lady Flora. He came into

church rather late, just as a choir of Lady Anne's well-trained scholars were bursting forth, in their glad young voices, their favourite hymn, "Hark the Herald Angels sing!" The Squire's new pew confronted that of the Countess: and thither Archer's eyes mechanically wandered, and a sharp pang of remorse shot through his heart, as before him he saw his young wife; but how changed since they had last parted! No answering gaze met his; a thick lace veil hung partly over the face that had so much attracted him a year since: but once when that face was raised for a moment, he read enough in that silent countenance to tell him, that the written sorrows of the last six months, were not feigned but real.

Flora neither knelt nor stood during the whole service: she sat immovable—between her upright, handsome mother and the sister in whose heart sympathy for her had never dwelt; the brother who cared for her was absent. Cecil's Christmas was passed as many others had been with his brother, the young Earl, who was stronger in mind and body than he had long since been. The

sermon was ended, but Archer had heard it not; he watched Lady Flora rise, draw down her veil and leave the church alone—the Countess and Lady Anne remaining back to partake of the sacrament. He hastily snatched up his hat, and followed her with an impetuosity quite unusual to him. At the door, however, the impulse, whatever it was, subsided, and he stood in the porch and waited for the rest of his party, with bent brows and a trembling passion working in his lip; meanwhile Lady Flora had entered the Countess's little hooded carriage, and its cream-coloured ponies were fast conveying her back to the Castle, without even her husband's Christmas wishes.

Archer walked fast on to the Manor with Maude, moody and full of dark thoughts: none of the Christmas holiness had stolen into his heart—no! not one ray! When Robert and Lucy came up to the Manor about an hour after, Maude followed Lucy upstairs to take off her bonnet, and throwing herself down on the side of the bed, she exclaimed:

“I say, Lucy, I have found it all out, so you may consider me clever in love affairs!”

“What are you talking about, Maude?” Lucy said, turning round from the glass where she had been smoothing her soft, glossy braids.

“Why truths, to be sure,” replied Maude, rocking herself backwards and forwards with a slight look of satisfaction on her face.

“Now, Maude, it is naughty of you to tantalize me.” And Lucy put her arms round her sister, saying, playfully, “I will not release you until I know your secret.”

“Oh! it is not my secret—it is theirs,” replied Maude. “What blind eyes, Lucy, yours must be not to have seen it!”

“If you mean Jane Blunt and Charles Hooper, I thought their behaviour too bad. They have plenty of time all day, I am sure, for laughing and whispering together, besides church-time.”

“And yet they must come to church to get it finished,” said Maude, laughing. “But my poor lovers are worse off than yours. They had not the advantage of the



proximity of free seats. A cold-hearted piece of stone chancel separated the rival pews like a great gulf. But, oh! Lucy, the ravenous looks Uncle Archer darted at Lady Flora! and the indignant frowns the Countess cast back at him—the battle of the eyes! It was such fun.”

“Hush, Maude!” said her sister, though she could not forbear laughing.

“I suppose it is rather wicked to see things in such a light at church; but it could not be helped. Uncle Archer was in a perfect fury, like one of papa’s dogs when James holds it back from going to the hunt with the rest. He looked as if he could have flown to Lady Flora; and there she sat like a leaf out of Miss Mead’s book of fashions—her veil draped half up, and her mantle folds not moving an inch. I declare she scarcely turned over the leaves of her prayer-book. Then, when she left the church, Uncle Archer dashed out after her; and I found him in the porch, looking like a thunder-cloud; and I declare he darted home like lightning. I had almost to run to keep pace with him; and when I

spoke, he answered me quite savagely. He had not even noticed our new singing, or heard the sermon, or anything. If you don't call that a case of hopeless love, I do not know what is!" said Maude, pausing to take breath.

Lucy laughed.

"Well, you may laugh," resumed Maude; "but I dare say it is no laughing matter with them. I knew all along, refusing Lord Glendowan was not the cause of Flora's melancholy looks. It is not likely that any girl of three-and-twenty would care about an aged creature like that. I am sure I would not! She can only have accepted him to get away from the Countess and her lady-sister; and she had never seen Uncle Archer then."

"Maude, it amuses me to hear you so seriously making out an affair between Uncle Archer and poor Flora."

"Oh, Lucy, you are married, and married people are slow," replied Maude; "because their own affairs of the kind have ended in a slow, jog-trot sort of love, they have no regard for anything of the kind in others. Now I

have ; and I should dearly like to see Uncle Archer triumph over the Countess's proud schemes for Lady Flora."

"But really, Maude, I think this is only nonsense which has taken possession of your head."

"We shall see," replied Maude. "Oh, Lucy ! what a lovely brooch ! Where did you get that ? Opals set with diamonds ! That surely was not the parson's extravagance ?"

"I should be very sorry if it were," said Lucy, unfastening the brooch out of her pink ribbon. "*Aunt Flora's* brother's Christmas present !" and Lucy laughed.

"You may ridicule what I say, if you please, little Mrs. Lucy," rejoined Maude ; "but if she is not 'Aunt Flora' one day, it will be no fault of either of them. But when did this brooch arrive ?"

"Oh ! Cecil left it with Robert for me when he went away. He is so very kind."

"Heigho !" sighed Maude, replacing the the brooch.

"What did you sigh for, Maude ?" \*

"I do not know. Come down now, Lucy.

We must not play truant any longer, or those below will pine after our sweet company.”

The remainder of that night did not pass off very brightly. Archer was uncommonly silent and gloomy; intensely preoccupied with something; and he winced and knit his brows at every mention of Lady Flora's name; while Maude seemed to take a delight in talking about her. Augusta had a headache, and was cross. Robert was called away from dinner to one of his parishioners who was dying. And at the Castle there seemed very little peace and love. The Countess came home from church, looking very stormy, and vented the whole fury of her wrath on Flora, because Archer Neville had looked on her. Poor Flora declared she had scarcely seen him, that it was no fault of hers if he did look towards their pew, her mamma had no feeling, or she must have noticed how ill she was in church. So poor Flora preserved her secret still, and in the midst of the Countess's upbraidings, went into a violent fit of hysterics, and spent the day of rejoicing in the solitude of her own room.

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It was a mild night in January: ghostly shadows fell aslant the lawn, silvery in the pure moonlight. The woodland paths of the old Castle caught the shades from the pine tops which crowned the grey hills; and these hills again let their shadows fall gently into the valleys beneath. The heavens were cloudless and unbroken, save where the stars, holy things, and the great white moon looked calmly down on God's earth below. The stars let their gaze fall on the velvet carpeting of the grass; the moon was reflected in the untroubled lake below, and set it in a thousand gems. There was a light in the Ghost's Tower, an unusual sight now; and under a tall elm, long since blasted by lightning, whose pale boughs stretched them forth like huge spectral arms, stood a figure wrapped in coat and plaid, with eyes looking fixedly at the Ghost's Turret, regarding not the weird story of the spectre dancers. The light burned on steadily, unwaveringly: the Lady Flora must surely be frequenting her old haunts again, forsaken since the legend had fallen so drearily on her ear. A very

light tread stepped on the grass, so soft, so gentle! Was it a fairy? Ah, no! fairies love the moonlight; and the form gliding so swiftly along, seemed ever choosing the shadows for her tread. A loose cloak enveloped her, whose hood covered and shaded her head and partly her face—it was a real inhabitant of earth, no shade of the dead Sybil that stepped under the blasted tree! 'Twas the Lady Flora who leant against that stricken elm, breathless and weary, for support; 'twas Archer Neville who clasped her in his arms. "Ever true, dearest Flora!" he exclaimed, and the tones seemed too impassioned for such a heart.

"Do not call me true. I am a deceiver even to myself. I cannot bear this longer; day and hour am I haunted by tormenting self-reproach."

"A tender conscience is often self-reproving. Flora, dearest, this must not be!"

"Oh Archer!" she exclaimed, "do not mock my misery. If you only look upon me after wealth, after fame, would it not be

better if we ceased to meet ; if I found a home within the walls of a convent, and you pursued unchecked your ambitious desires.”

“This from you, Flora !” he sighed in a tender tone of reproach.

“Oh, Archer ! do not upbraid me. If you knew the misery of the last six months ; and how, but for Lucy, I should have wished myself dead !” she wept bitterly as she spoke.

Archer soothed her awhile, then asked anxiously : “How has Lucy influenced you—does she know our secret ?”

“No one knows it,” she replied, “save your strong heart and my weak breaking one,” she wept again in utter wretchedness.

“You give way to too much despair, Flora,” he said. “Would the Countess, think you, be so inexorable, if we still concealed our marriage ; and I offered myself as suitor for your hand ?”

“Oh, worse ! worse than inexorable ! and Anne, my cold, stern sister, hates you as much as she does me. Archer, they suspect us of love. When you sat beside me the other evening, eyes were on us—watchful and

jealous ; and when you were gone—oh ! my mother's words ! Archer," and Flora's voice sank into a whisper, "she would turn me out of doors, did she know it !"

"I defy her !" he exclaimed with a dark flash in his eyes. "I defy her ! Flora. We have had many meetings, and we may have been watched ; but to-night I can tell you, that yet another week, and I come to claim you. Ask me nothing, how or why this hasty conclusion. I tell you, beloved, to-morrow I leave for London ; this day week I return and take to my home the Lady *Flora Neville*."

There was a narrow path near, overhung with dark firs. He drew her away to this spot, and put her arm in his—she shuddered as the cold shade fell upon her. "Oh, Archer, not here !" she said, "I cannot bear it !" They went up the damp path into a pleasure garden, she shivering in the cold night air ; then suddenly she said, "You know the Legend of the Turret ?"

"Every one does, Flora mine ! but how does that refer to us ?"

"While Sir Amyas waited for his armed men, death came to Sybil ! Why not take me



away now, Archer? I have a presentiment ere another week closes, that something will happen. Oh, Archer! that story haunts me. Do I sleep by night, 'tis in my dreams. Do I walk by day, it is ever beside me; even now I seem to see the bleeding Sybil before me."

"Dear Flora, this is superstitious and weak," and Archer laughed at her fears. "I tell you again, my own wife, yet another week, and neither the spectral Sybil nor the living Countess shall be your terror any longer! Our secret marriage is no isolated case—it is what many have done before, and will do still. Lucy's father gained his bride in the same manner."

"It will break my mother's heart," she murmured in a low, wailing tone.

"Oh, Flora! can you care for such a mother?" he said reproachfully.

"And the world will hold me up as a byeword of contempt and shame; and shun me—oh, how scornfully!"

"And do you fear the world, Flora?" Ah, what good will the world do you! Will it love

and shelter you? Flora, Flora, you regret Lord Glendowan!"

Flora raised her drooping head, and a shade of pride crossed that sad countenance as she replied, "Oh, Archer! why taunt me with that name—that never was to pass our lips? It is the first time my weakness has invited my husband's scorn."

"Pardon, dearest Flora!" Archer exclaimed, "it was but haste, not taunts. Heaven forbid! that I should thus cruelly use you. It is but jealousy of you, my precious Flora—tell me that you regret him not."

"Regret him? Never! oh proudly will I join you—proudly do I bear your name! But now, Archer, we must part, ere I am missed."

They did part. And an owl high in the pine tops, hooted a dismal accompaniment to their passionate farewell. Shudderingly and noiselessly did Flora step from the damp shadow into the chilly moonlight. A fever throbbed in her heart, and those drooping sad eyes, glowed with the light of an unnatural fire: the dim flame still flickered in

the Ghost's Tower. Flora directed her gaze there irresistibly, and yet with horror, as she hurried across the dank grass of the woods. She who had longed for love throughout her life, now nearly sank beneath it: it was a hard task to persevere in her deception, a difficult deceit to keep up. With Archer it was easy: his dark eyes seemed ever to commune with secrets, he the clever, courted man, with grey mingling prematurely among his raven hair; who came and went at London *soirées*; who came and went at Castle St. Agnes; hitherto trusted, looked up to; and till those passionate looks on that Christmas morning, how utterly unsuspected.

This evening, Archer had implored Flora to meet him as he left Forsted the following day; and Flora excused herself from the family circle on the plea of finishing a painting in her studio. No one wondered at anything Flora did: she had become so very strange of late; and neither the Countess nor Lady Anne cared for her sufficiently to miss her society. Cecil both missed her, and wondered why she preferred a solitary evening in the gloom of the "Ghost's

Turret," for which he knew she had conceived an aversion. It was close upon ten o'clock, when Cecil, weary of the monotony of the conversation in the drawing-room, wandered forth on the terrace to enjoy the moonlight. He took two or three turns, then paused to look up at his sister's turret, for he was thinking of Flora. The light burned there steadily. He longed to intrude upon her solitude. It was painful to him to think there was one among that small circle who concealed some secret grief. He turned aside to gaze on the tranquil, sleeping landscape, and the miles and miles of valley that slumbered at his feet. While he looked, a shadowy figure emerged spectre-like from the shade of a knot of oaks. Cecil's eyes were fixed on it, as it crossed the grass, and was lost again in the shadow. He knew the daughter of one of the gamekeepers often crossed the park to visit a sister who served at the Castle; so after looking once more, he returned again to his walk and meditations on the stone terrace. He was pacing to and fro entirely under the shadow of the Castle,

and the moon shone not on him, therefore it was, that Flora thinking herself safe, mounted the steps, and also trod the terrace, seeking a side door which communicated with the turret stairs. She stole along, frightened at what she, the timid, shrinking one, had done.

The light burned still in the "Ghost's Tower." Her eyes mechanically sought it, and when she withdrew them, Cecil Erresford turned in his walk and confronted her.

She started back with a faint scream of terror and surprise. Cecil stepped forward, exclaiming: "Flora! is it possible you are out so late?"

"Yes! I just took a little walk," she replied, recovering herself.

"We thought you were in your studio—a light burns there still, Flora," her brother continued, looking steadily at her.

"I left my lamp burning," she replied nervously. "I could not paint nor read; my head ached and I was so miserable, that I came into the moonlight. It was better there than in my gloomy studio."

“But, my dearest sister, no one wished you to remain in your studio,” said Cecil.

“Oh! I know it. No one asked me to sit alone. I chose it. I thought I should like to look over my paintings, only my head throbbed,” she raised her hand instinctively to her burning temples.

“Take my arm, Flora,” said her brother, “let us return in-doors: you ought not to remain out longer in this cold night air.”

“Very well, as you please,” she replied.

“Flora, my dear girl, do tell me what has, during the last few months, changed you,” Cecil asked anxiously, “and made you so wretched and unhappy.”

“I have never been very happy, Cecil,” she replied in a low voice.

“It grieves me to hear you say so,” he replied.

“Oh! do not think about me,” interrupted Flora. “I am not changed; I never was lively; never was bright like other girls; so you must not expect it of me. Cecil, we will come in now.” And she urged him towards the door.

“Flora,” said her brother, stopping as they approached the entrance, “I am convinced there is something on your mind which you conceal, that causes the change in you. I do not wish to penetrate into your thoughts or feelings; but would it ease your mind to make me the participator in any trouble which may oppress you? You know, or ought to know,” he added, after a moment’s pause, “how really I love you, and how gladly I would do anything to further plans for your happiness.”

“Oh! I have no plans, no secrets. What makes you think so?” she looked at him for the first time during their walk, and his eyes were fixed on hers compassionately, enquiringly.

“I think so, Flora,” he replied, “because you would never walk in the park at this hour unattended, without some especial reason.”

“I am never believed,” she murmured, in a low, tearful voice, “I never have been.”

“When, Flora, have I ever doubted your word?” asked Cecil gently.

“Oh! not you; but every one else,” she replied. Then drawing her cloak closer around her, she said, “I am cold; do not question me. I have nothing to tell.”

“I do not wish you to tell me anything, except that you love me, sister mine. I wish I could hear you say that.”

“My love is worth no one’s acceptance,” she replied. “I wonder you, Cecil, who are so courted, so loved, should care for so trivial a thing!”

“A trivial thing!” he said, “dear Flora! Do not shun the care and affection I would give you.”

“I do not shun you, Cecil—how falsely I am accused!”

It was of no use to argue with her, so he led her into the hall. The light of the lamps shone across such a haggard, anxious face, that it pained Cecil’s heart. Flora might deny it, but he was more than ever convinced something which he knew not caused that woe.

Directly they entered the house, Flora wished him good-night, and walked quickly away. She was so unlike her usual self, so wild-looking, so agitated, that Cecil, unap-



prehensive as he generally was, actually had a flash of fear that her mind might be affected. He followed her quickly. "Do you return to your studio, Flora?" he asked.

"Yes! but let me be alone."

"The stairs are steep, I will take you up them," he said, as again he drew her reluctant hand through his arm.

When they arrived at the turret door, he endeavoured to open it for her; but the key was out, and the lock turned.

The key was in Flora's pocket. She dreaded to produce it, for fear of her brother's suspicions, which she felt were already awakened, and might be further aroused. But after a moment's hesitation, she considered that her secret, even if discovered, was safer with Cecil than any one else; so instead of a feigned surprise, which she meditated, she put the key in the lock, and assigned no reason for having shut out from her room all intruders during her absence.

"No one shall know of this meeting, Flora," said her brother on parting.

She felt certain then that he had discovered something. Perhaps he had been following her;

perhaps even a witness to her meeting with Archer. Her lips were cold and trembling as she received Cecil's embrace, and she spoke not, for utterance failed her; and scarcely had he closed the door, when she sank down on the floor, and burying her head on a couch, sobbed aloud.

What ailed Flora, and why she walked alone at so late an hour, were questions which Cecil asked himself in vain that night. Could she have made an appointment to meet any one? Cecil rejected the idea as improbable.

On the morrow he was to leave the Castle, and join the Earl in London, previously to starting on a long tour through the States, and in Central America. His brother's health, both of mind and body was greatly improved, and his physicians thought much benefit might accrue from a perfect change; and the young Earl being particularly desirous that Cecil should accompany him, he had resolved to gratify his wish.

Cecil felt loth to leave Flora. He was convinced that there was a mystery hanging over her; a mystery concealed beneath the

impenetrable veil of her own strange temper. But the morrow came, and they parted.

Flora's farewell was constrained and hurried.

"Ah!" she thought, "when he returns, he will find me very different from what I am now! Another week," she repeated to herself—"Another week—hold on till then!"

The Countess had never mentioned to Cecil her suspicions concerning Archer Neville, or he might have found some clue to that which so much puzzled him.

Sir Edgar was again apparently dying. Archer trusted that in another week, he might be in possession of the long coveted property. Flora was no longer to be resisted; her prayers and tears overcame him; and should Sir Edgar linger on, he was too ill to alter his will—the will that was to give Archer all he had so long hoped for.

## CHAPTER XIII.

O hush! . . . . To prayer and tear  
Of mine thou hast refused thine ear;  
But now the awful hour draws on,  
When truth must speak in loftier tone.

ROKEBY.

THE Countess De Walden sat by a table in her morning room, at half-past five o'clock the day after Lady Flora's nocturnal meeting with Archer Neville, in silence, but in great indignation; while the Lady Anne put the last stitch to a coarse brown holland pinafore, and surveyed it with an inward satisfaction. Her good works were manifold, and she built upon them: peace for the present, security for hereafter. At the same hour, Cecil sat in the library in Park Lane, and thought uneasily

of Flora. His brother, the young Earl, dozed by the fire : the expression of his face was sad and helpless ; and as Cecil glanced at him, he again thought of Flora, whom he greatly resembled. Precisely at half-past five, Lady Flora entered her mother's morning room ; and drawing her chair close to the fire, remarked how cold it was, and what a thick fog filled the park. No reply from the two proud ones at the table ! Flora gave a message from Mrs. Aylmer, her kind regards and thanks for a book the Countess had sent her—no reply ! Flora supposed De Walden and Cecil were together by this time—no answer ! Flora raised her head, and saw a storm lowering over the proud ones at the table—storms came frequently from thence ; it was a stormy quarter and blew frequent gales. Flora trembled beneath them, yet was habituated to their wearing blasts. She gathered up the folds of her shawl and rose to depart, desiring, if possible, to postpone the storm ; but it was on the eve of breaking forth, and would not be delayed.

Flora paused in her passage from the fire to the door to take a book off the centre table.

A newspaper lay before her with the obituary turned upwards. Her eyes rested on it, the first announcement rather startled her.

“On the 16th instant, at his residence in Grosvenor Place, Sir Edgar Tyrrell, Bart., in his 67th year.”

Lucy and she had only been talking of him a short time before, and Lucy was telling her how fond he was of her Uncle Archer. “Mamma, did you see this?” Flora exclaimed, turning the paper towards the Countess. “Sir Edgar Tyrrell is dead.”

“I am perfectly aware of it,” was her Ladyship’s cold reply.

Flora looked up at her mother and said, “Poor old man, I am very sorry.”

“We often do feel sorry for those out of our own family; but hesitate not to bring sorrows in,” was the Countess’s rejoinder.

Flora’s eyes still travelled down the “Times.” Lady Anne watched her with a secret triumph in her expression—the Countess sighed in a martyr-like manner. Presently Flora pushed aside the paper, and turned away with her book in one hand, while with the other she gathered up the handsome,

bright shawl which hung on the floor. Her face was slightly flushed with stooping, and her dark eyes looked large and lustrous: she would have made an elegant picture with the light from the lamp falling on her. "Flora!" the Countess said. Flora's hand was opening the door, but she turned back, thinking one more week, and all harsh words will be at an end! She stood now quietly expecting a storm: its first breath came in the words, "Flora, what were you doing last evening after tea?"

Flora coloured deeply. "Looking over the paintings in my studio," she replied.

"Indeed! I imagined you had been otherwise employed, and am glad to hear you give such a satisfactory account of your evening," said the Countess, in a sarcastic tone of voice, while poor Flora trembled and scarcely breathed. "You did not happen to walk out last night about ten?" the Countess fixed on her younger daughter her piercing eyes.

Flora looked on the ground and said hastily. "Really, mamma, it is strange I cannot spend an evening alone without being questioned and called to account."

“Those very words show you are ashamed of something,” remarked the Countess, in the same chilling tone.

Lady Flora felt the old slumbering passion of her childish days rise, as she replied, “Mamma, you have always been suspicious of me, and I suppose you will find harm now in my having taken a few turns with Cecil to enjoy the moonlight.”

“With Cecil! Was there no one else present?”

“Who could there be, mamma?” Flora asked, her lips white and quivering.

“That is best known to yourself,” observed Lady Anne, continuing her work, and sewing vigorously at the hard material.

“Perhaps it was a bat,” replied Flora, checking an hysterical laugh.

“Hush, Flora!” exclaimed the Countess angrily. “Answer me this—were you in the Upper Park yesterday morning?”

“You know, mamma, I was in-doors all day.”

“*Bon!*” replied the Countess. “You were not in the Upper Park on Sunday?”



“How was it possible, mamma, when I only drove to and from church?”

“Oh! do not appeal to me about your movements Flora!” the Countess said, then stretching her hand across to Lady Anne’s work-basket, she drew forth something glittering, and holding up to Flora’s view a serpent bracelet with enamel and diamonds on the head, added, “I suppose, Flora, you will tell me next this bracelet belongs to Hearn, the gamekeeper’s wife, and that she dropped it under the withered elm last night?”

Lady Flora grasped fast by the table. Her shawl fell and draped in folds round her feet, she stood silent and horror-stricken.

“I am suspicious, Flora, yes! I am suspicious;” the Countess said with increasing bitterness in her voice.

Lady Anne’s needle made a hard-hearted, satisfactory sound, as it worked to and from the child’s pinafore—except that there was complete silence.

Then the Countess rose to her full height,

and laying her hands on the back of her chair, exclaimed :

“Flora, I command you to tell me, before you leave my presence, how this bracelet came to be found last night at twelve o’clock?”

Flora’s lips quivered in the attempt to frame a reply.

“No excuse, Flora,” interrupted the Countess, “no falsehood! not a shade of tarnish is on the gold—only a very short time could it have lain on that damp grass.” Her lady mother looked at her with the full, earnest depth of those deep, scornful eyes. All speech was terrified out of Flora, and again another silence!

“If Flora thinks any of the servants had taken it, mamma, would it not be best to let them all be summoned?” Lady Anne said, with a peculiar glance in her rigid countenance.

“Oh! no, no!” interrupted Flora, “no one took it.”

“Then you acknowledge having dropped it,” rejoined Lady Anne drily.

“I never missed it, I assure you,” said Flora, who was too frightened to think of any plausible excuse. “I wore it at dinner-time certainly, but I imagined it was in my jewel-case now—I never missed it.”

“You were too pre-occupied doubtless,” was the Countess’s rejoinder; “but can you imagine, child, it is the bracelet I am thinking or caring about. No, what is its value, were it ten times as great, compared with the disgrace you are bringing upon your family? Flora, you have been a source of trouble and anxiety to me from your infancy, until this unhappy day!”

“I know it, mamma, and I have often wished myself dead!” Flora whispered.

“How can you utter such wickedness!” exclaimed Lady Anne, crackling her work with an impatient angry sound—two or three rats in the wainscot went hurrying along, tumbling the mortar down in their gambols—the wind sighed in the chimney, and the wood fire gave out scornful hisses. The Countess sat down again, and fanned herself with a bunch of Paradise feathers from off the

mantel-piece, then had recourse to salts. Flora stood grasping the table, with no power to stir, all self-command completely lost. At this juncture, the gong sent forth its ponderous summons to prepare for dinner, and caused the Countess to exclaim :

“Flora, this must end by your telling me wherefore you visited the withered elm last night?”

“A pleasant nocturnal ramble !” put in Lady Anne’s provoking voice.

Again was Lady Flora’s old anger aroused.

“Anything is better then being with those whose only delight, when I am in their presence, is to find fault with and reproach me.”

“Stay, stay ; this language is unbearable,” burst forth the Countess. “Listen, Flora, quietly, I command you ! At nine o’clock last evening, my daughter—an Erresford, leaves the drawing-room, under the false pretences of study and rest. At nine o’clock, that man, Archer Neville, had left the Manor, and was seen on the direct road to the Upper Park. Can it be possible that my daughter and that man met—an Erresford hold converse at night

with an intriguing, presumptuous upstart ?” The Countess’s voice was slightly raised.

The warm colour rushed across Lady Flora’s face as she exclaimed :—

“ Stop, mamma, I did meet him, and I am proud of it !” She trembled from head to foot.

“ Flora, wicked child ! how dare you insult me—how dare you tell me this ? I know not if it is your first meeting ; but it shall be your last ! My daughter, ungrateful, unworthy though she be—shall never more disgrace the family name by midnight meetings, or an alliance with a man in every way so utterly inferior to the noble one she has cast off. Descend from Glendowan to Archer Neville ! No : hypocritical girl ! No : my voice shall prevent this—my interference shall check this ! Flora, how dared you—how dared he ?” The Countess’s voice was nearly choked with anger, but she added ; “ Flora ! you yourself shall put a final stop to this shameful intriguing man’s presumption—and I myself will write.”

“ Hush, mamma—stop, mamma !” exclaimed Flora, with a fixed, stony look ; her trembling

hands drew out the ribbon she always wore round her neck, and unclasped the locket. Something she took out—something she held in her trembling fingers ; then holding up her left hand, she cried : “ Six months ago he placed this here—he, my own, own husband ; and for ever, and for ever I shall wear it ! Nothing can separate us—nothing can part us, but death ! I am his for ever.” She uttered this in a sort of wild shriek.

The Countess looked at her, a cold, stern look—then laying her hand on her arm said :

“ Go, join him ; and henceforth let me see your face no more !” The door was opened by that proud mother’s hand, and without an interceding word from her sister, the wretched girl stood alone on the cold marble pavement of that wide, dreary hall.

The respective attendants of the three noble ladies, waited long and wonderingly in their ladies’ rooms, with all the paraphernalia ready for the evening toilettes ; but their ladies came not. Agnese listened at the top of the stairs—it was she who had met Archer Neville and watched him enter the Park. Stevens

admired herself in the glass. Mrs. Brook, the Countess's staid attendant, did a great deal to a pair of slippers, destined as an arrow at the heart of the head butler. At about half-past six, Stevens took refuge in a novel lying on Flora's dressing-table, and was so lost in its charms, and so bathed in tears over a hero contemplating suicide at the loss of a heroine with no heart, that she did not hear rapid steps ascend the stairs, and tread the gallery. Wide started the door, and to her dismay and horror, Lady Flora entered and wildly flung herself on her bed with her face buried in the pillows.

"Oh, dear me!" cried poor Stevens—this was usually her exclamation after a family scene. "Oh, my poor dear lady, what can I do for you?" Stevens could do nothing.

Lady Flora's hands were clasped together beneath her face; and this was sunk deep in the pillows. Eau-de-Cologne, cold water, salts, were of no avail. They could not be applied. All Stevens could do was to stand by and ejaculate "Oh dear!" between her tears.

At length, considerably after its time, the

dinner-bell sounded. Then Lady Flora started up, and stared wildly at Stevens. Her face was flushed scarlet; her eyes gleamed with a vivid brightness; her hair fell over one side of her face, while from the other it was pushed away. Round her eyes were two deep, dark marks; and her whole countenance betokened extreme agony. Stevens brought some cold water; and Lady Flora bathed her forehead for some minutes, till she seemed partially revived, her maid looking passively on, accustomed to scenes, and asking no questions. But not a little surprised and startled was she when Lady Flora exclaimed, in a hollow voice:

“Put some things together—I am going!”

“Oh! my lady, where? Oh! my lady, what is this?” and poor Stevens wrung her hands.

“I am going to him—to my husband!” She raised her hands; and the maid stood aghast at the wedding ring glittering on her lady’s finger. Again Lady Flora repeated the order that her things should be packed, so wildly, so strangely, that Stevens obeyed in fear, and with tears and sobs, cleared boxes,



drawers, and spread a *mélange* of shawls, dresses, and jewellery about. A sort of mockery it seemed to her lady's forlorn sorrow. Lady Flora sat motionless, her forehead resting on the back of a chair. She did not appear to notice anything till a time-piece on the mantel-shelf struck eight. Then she exclaimed, in a tone of grief:

“It will be too late! Not all that, Stevens—only just a bag and the picture.”

She looked up, and before her, in its gilt frame, was the likeness of the calm, sweet Lucy gazing down upon her.

“I will go to her,” Flora said, in a whisper, as the maid obediently took down her lady's painting she had so often admired. The picture was carefully wrapped in paper. That and a little bag, Lady Flora said, was all she required. And, after directing Stevens to wrap her in a large cloak, she sent her to order a carriage to be got ready immediately.

The servants' hall was all wonder. The Countess and Lady Anne were dining as usual. What could all this mean? Stevens suggested they were “heartless wretches,”

and then went off into hysterics, and was angrily conveyed by the housekeeper to her own dominions, out of the reach of the host of gossiping men and maidens. Another quarter of an hour, and the Lady Flora crossed the hall, solitary and alone; and without one single farewell entered the carriage that was to convey her from her home. She gave no directions where to go, until asked by the servant, when she said, "The new Branstone Station—drive fast!" When the door was closed, she sank down in the bottom of the carriage, and groaned aloud.

It was a cold, damp night, very different from the preceding one. No one went out, but from necessity or love. Lucy Aylmer went for the latter purpose, to meet her Robert on his return from St. Margaret's, where he had been to visit Hubert Mostyn. She stood at the door of the waiting-room, looking anxiously for the arrival of the down-train, which was late on account of the fog. While she looked forth at the lamps which dimly lit the little country station, a tall, female figure, wrapped in a long, dark

travelling cloak, passed her. Lucy looked at it wonderingly. It disappeared, then passed again. This time Lucy followed it towards the light of a lamp. A strange feeling shot across her, as her suspicions were realised, and she discovered the Lady Flora.

“Flora, darling! what are you doing here?” she asked.

“Lucy, you will despise me.” Flora said in a low tone. “You have no secrets.”

There were one or two persons on the platform, and Lucy drew Flora away into the waiting-room, made her sit down on the rough horse-hair sofa, and placing herself by her side, gently put up Flora’s thick lace veil. One glance at that wild, tearless face, alarmed the gentle Lucy, but she strove to be very calm, as she said, “Flora, darling! it is not right to come here alone.”

“I am not alone. Roberts is waiting to put me in the train.”

“What train, dear?” Lucy asked amazed. Four hours ago, Lady Flora had left her very calm, and for her, almost happy.

“The train for London—Lucy,” she added in a low whisper. “I am married, and I am going to *him*! Do not despise me. I have deceived every one, and now they have cast me out!”

Lucy felt strangely agitated, as hastily the words “Aunt Flora,” uttered jestingly to Maude on Christmas-Day, flashed back upon her; but she said with her usual self-control, “Flora, darling! I am afraid you are very unhappy?”

“It will soon be over now,” she replied as she guided Lucy’s fingers to hers and made them press her ring—“Six months,” she whispered, “six months ago—that was the 12th of July”—her head sank heavily on Lucy’s shoulder.

“Do not go to him, darling, we will send for him to come to you,” Lucy said gently—“Will you let me take you home with me—To-morrow he can be with you?”

“Oh, he will be angry!” Flora murmured. “I have betrayed his secret. It was to have been another week longer—oh! Lucy, what shall I do?”

“ Darling, he will not be angry if you stay with me ; and Robert shall bring him to you. You cannot travel to-night.”

Flora sat upright, and murmured : “ Oh ! Archer, Archer !”

Lucy uttered no expression of surprise at this, the confirmation of her fears ; but gently endeavoured to dissuade Flora from attempting her journey. She gave way at last, saying she would set out by daylight on the morrow.

The down train was three quarters of an hour behind its time ; and when Robert arrived, Lucy was gone in Lady Flora’s carriage. He had not expected his little wife ; so putting himself in the Squire’s dog-cart which was awaiting him, and in which Lucy had come, he drove home through the mist, longing for his fireside after the solitary journey to the solitary brotherhood.

Gladly he discovered the lights at the vicarage. With a light heart he threw aside the reins ; but what ailed his little wife ? For she met him at the door, and told him in stifled tones—Lady Flora was dying !

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In Sir Edgar Tyrrell's handsome library, a small party was assembled, amongst them might be seen Archer Neville, leaning back in a large easy chair; his arms crossed, his face calm, composed—his heart secure—secure of his godfather's treasure, and scarcely showing either interest in, or attention to an old lawyer in black, who held in his hand the will of Sir Edgar Tyrrell, whose old enemy the gout, had at length carried him off, during Archer's absence at Forsted. No arrangements had been made regarding his funeral, and the will had an early reading to discover the late Baronet's wishes on the subject. The first clause in the will bequeathed all the landed property to Lady Tyrrell; then came sundry legacies, among them a handsome one for Lucy Aylmer; but to the surprise and dismay of some present, after a tolerably large sum for the last rites, the whole of Sir Edgar's vast funded property fell to the lot of his godson and legal adviser, Archer Neville, who was to assume the name of Tyrrell. Some present murmur, and some whisper angrily; but Archer sits upright and looks with uncon-

cern at his learned brother, whose puckered old face, however, relaxes not a muscle. Just one gleam of satisfaction and pleasure dances in Archer's eyes. Slowly the door opens ; a tall servant glides up to him, bringing a pressing telegraphic message, which has pursued him from May-Fair. What does it say? It bids him come instantly to Forsted Vicarage to the death-bed of his wife ! And this blow falls just when he thought his hopes were all realized. He has lived for riches first, and has made his love subservient to his riches. In grasping after them, he has lost his Flora ! He leaves the Baronet's library, his head high, his eyes steady. No one observes any outward change ; but even his worldly heart is full of bitter thoughts of self-accusation. The remembrance of his last interview with his neglected wife tortures him : it would have crushed any man less stony, less rigid than Archer Neville !

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